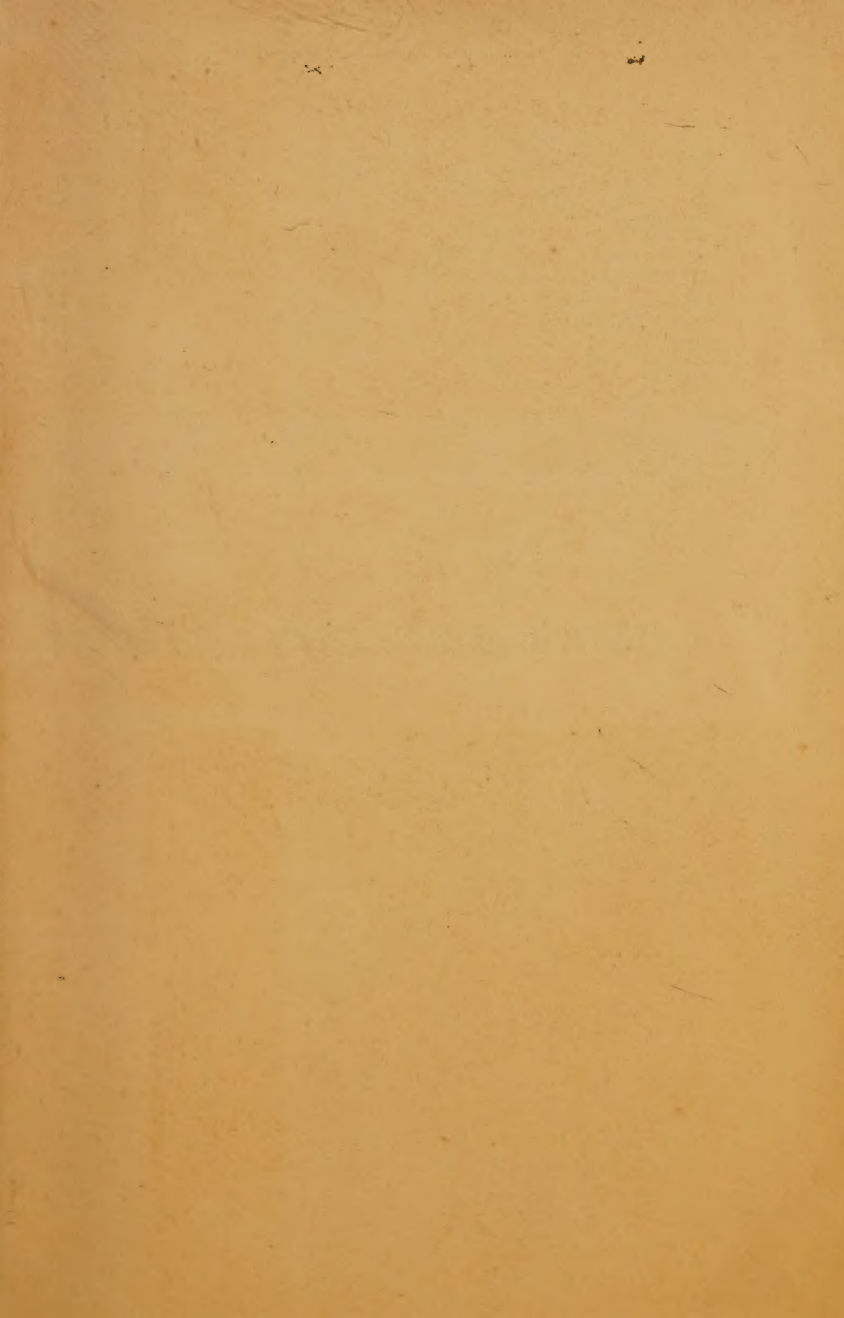


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THE CLAYHANGER FAMILY

WORKS BY ARNOLD BENNETT

NOVELS

A MAN FROM THE NORTH
ANNA OF THE FIVE TOWNS
LEONORA
A GREAT MAN
SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE
WHOM GOD HATH JOINED
BURIED ALIVE
THE OLD WIVES' TALE
THE GLIMPSE
LILIAN
MR. PROHACK

HELEN WITH THE HIGH HAND
THE PRICE OF LOVE
CLAYHANGER
HILDA LESSWAYS
THESE TWAIN
THE ROLL CALL
THE CARD
THE REGENT
THE LION'S SHARE
THE PRETTY LADY
RICEYMAN STEPS

FANTASIAS

THE GRAND BABYLON HOTEL
THE GATES OF WRATH
TERESA OF WATLING STREET

THE LOOT OF CITIES
HUGO
THE GHOST
THE CITY OF PLEASURE

SHORT STORIES

TALES OF THE FIVE TOWNS
ELSIE AND THE CHILD

THE GRIM SMILE OF THE FIVE TOWNS
THE MATADOR OF THE FIVE TOWNS

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HOW TO BECOME AN AUTHOR
THE TRUTH ABOUT AN AUTHOR
MENTAL EFFICIENCY
HOW TO LIVE ON TWENTY-FOUR
HOURS A DAY
THE HUMAN MACHINE
THINGS THAT HAVE INTERESTED ME

LITERARY TASTE
THE FEAST OF ST. FRIEND
MARRIED LIFE
THE AUTHOR'S CRAFT
LIBERTY
OVER THERE
BOOKS AND PERSONS
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SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE
BODY AND SOUL

DON JUAN

MISCELLANEOUS

THEIR UNITED STATE
PARIS NIGHTS

OUR WOMEN
THE LOG OF THE "VELSA"

(In Collaboration with EDEN PHILLPOTTS)

THE SINEWS OF WAR: A ROMANCE
THE STATUE: A ROMANCE

(In Collaboration with EDWARD KNOBLOCK)

MILESTONES
LONDON LIFE

THE CLAYHANGER FAMILY

- I. CLAYHANGER
- II. HILDA LESSWAYS
- III. THESE TWAIN

BY

ARNOLD BENNETT

SECOND EDITION



METHUEN & CO. LTD.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON

THE CLAYBARGER FAMILY

I. CLAYBARGER
II. HEDDA CLAYBARGER
III. THOSE WHO

ARNOLD BENNETT

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REAR VIEW

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REAR VIEW

REAR VIEW

THE CLAYHANGER FAMILY

I. CLAYHANGER

BOOK I

HIS VOCATION

CHAPTER I

THE LAST OF A SCHOOLBOY

I

EDWIN CLAYHANGER stood on the steep-sloping, red-bricked canal bridge, in the valley between Bursley and its suburb Hillport. In that neighbourhood the Knype and Mersey canal formed the western boundary of the industrialism of the Five Towns. To the east rose pit-heads, chimneys, and kilns, tier above tier, dim in their own mists. To the west, Hillport Fields, grimed but possessing authentic hedgerows and winding paths, mounted broadly up to the sharp ridge on which stood Hillport Church, a landmark. Beyond the ridge, and partly protected by it from the driving smoke of the Five Towns, lay the fine and ancient Tory borough of Oldcastle, from whose historic Middle School Edwin Clayhanger was now walking home. The fine and ancient Tory borough provided education for the whole of the Five Towns, but the relentless ignorance of its prejudices had blighted the district. A hundred years earlier the canal had only been obtained after a vicious Parliamentary fight between industry and the fine and ancient borough,

which saw in canals a menace to its importance as a centre of traffic. Fifty years earlier the fine and ancient borough had succeeded in forcing the greatest railway line in England to run through unpopulated country five miles off instead of through the Five Towns, because it loathed the mere conception of a railway. And now, people are inquiring why the Five Towns, with a railway system special to itself, is characterized by a perhaps excessive provincialism. These interesting details have everything to do with the history of Edwin Clayhanger, as they have everything to do with the history of each of the two hundred thousand souls in the Five Towns. Oldcastle guessed not the vast influences of its sublime stupidity.

It was a breezy Friday in July, 1872. The canal, which ran north and south, reflected a blue and white sky. Towards the bridge, from the north came a long narrow canal-boat roofed with tarpaulins; and towards the bridge, from the south came a similar craft, sluggishly creeping. The towing-path was a morass of sticky brown mud, for in the way of rain that year was breaking the records of a century and a half. Thirty yards in front of each boat an unhappy skeleton of a horse floundered its best in the quagmire. The honest endeavour of one of the animals received a frequent tonic from a bare-legged girl of seven who heartily curled a whip about its crooked large-jointed legs. The ragged and filthy child danced in the rich mud round the horse's flanks with the simple joy of one who had been rewarded for good behaviour by the unrestricted use of a whip for the first time.

II

Edwin, with his elbows on the stone parapet of the bridge stared uninterested at the spectacle of the child, the whip, and the skeleton. He was not insensible to the piquancy of the pageant of life, but his mind was preoccupied with grave and heavy matters. He had left school that day, and what his eyes saw as he leaned on the bridge was not a willing beast and a gladdened infant, but the puzzling world and the advance guard of its problems bearing down on him. Slim, gawky, untidy, fair, with his worn black-braided clothes, and slung over his shoulders in a bursting satchel the last load of his

school-books, and on his bright, rough hair a shapeless cap whose lining protruded behind, he had the extraordinary wistful look of innocence and simplicity which marks most boys of sixteen. It seemed rather a shame, it seemed even tragic, that this naïve, simple creature, with his straightforward and friendly eyes so eager to believe appearances, this creature immaculate of worldly experience, must soon be transformed into a man, wary, incredulous, detracting. Older eyes might have wept at the simplicity of those eyes.

This picture of Edwin as a wistful innocent would have made Edwin laugh. He had been seven years at school, and considered himself a hardened sort of brute, free of illusions. And he sometimes thought that he could judge the world better than most neighbouring mortals.

"Hello! . The Sunday!" he murmured, without turning his eyes.

Another boy, a little younger and shorter, and clothed in a superior untidiness, had somehow got on to the bridge, and was leaning with his back against the parapet which supported Edwin's elbows. His eyes were franker and simpler even than the eyes of Edwin, and his lips seemed to be permanently parted in a good-humoured smile. His name was Charlie Orgreave, but at school he was invariably called 'the Sunday'—not 'Sunday,' but 'the Sunday'—and nobody could authoritatively explain how he had come by the nickname. Its origin was lost in the prehistoric ages of his childhood. He and Edwin had been chums for several years. They had not sworn fearful oaths of loyalty; they did not constitute a secret society; they had not even pricked forearms and written certain words in blood; for these rites are only performed at Harrow, and possibly at the Oldcastle High School, which imitates Harrow. Their fellowship meant chiefly that they spent a great deal of time together, instinctively and unconsciously enjoying each other's mere presence, and that in public arguments they always reinforced each other, whatever the degree of intellectual dishonesty thereby necessitated.

"I'll bet you mine gets to the bridge first," said the Sunday. With an ingenious movement of the shoulders he arranged himself so that the parapet should bear the weight of his satchel.

Edwin Clayhanger slowly turned round, and perceived that the object which the Sunday had appropriated as 'his' was the other canal-boat, advancing from the south.

"Horse or boat?" asked Edwin.

"Boat's nose, of course," said the Sunday.

"Well," said Edwin, having surveyed the unconscious competitors, and counting on the aid of the whipping child, "I don't mind laying you five."

"That be damned for a tale!" protested the Sunday. "We said we'd never bet less than ten—you know that."

"Yes, but——" Edwin hesitatingly drawled.

"But what?"

"All right. Ten," Edwin agreed. "But it's not fair. You've got a rare start on me."

"Rats!" said the Sunday, with finality. In the pronunciation of this word the difference between his accent and Edwin's came out clear. The Sunday's accent was less local; there was a hint of a short 'e' sound in the 'a,' and a briskness about the consonants, that Edwin could never have compassed. The Sunday's accent was as carelessly superior as his clothes. Evidently the Sunday had some one at home who had not learnt the art of speech in the Five Towns.

III

He began to outline a scheme, in which perpendicular expectoration figured, for accurately deciding the winner, and a complicated argument might have ensued about this, had it not soon become apparent that Edwin's boat was going to be handsomely beaten, despite the joyous efforts of the little child. The horse that would die but would not give up, was only saved from total subsidence at every step by his indomitable if aged spirit. Edwin handed over the ten marbles even before the other boat had arrived at the bridge.

"Here," he said. "And you may as well have these, too," adding five more to the ten, all he possessed. They were not the paltry marble of to-day, plaything of infants, but the majestic 'rinker,' black with white spots, the king of marbles in an era when whole populations practised the game. Edwin looked at them half regretfully as they lay in the Sunday's hands. They seemed prodigious wealth in those hands, and

he felt somewhat as a condemned man might feel who bequeaths his jewels on the scaffold. Then there was a rattle, and a tumour grew out larger on the Sunday's thigh.

The winning boat, long preceded by its horse, crawled under the bridge and passed northwards to the sea, laden with crates of earthenware. And then the loser, with the little girl's father and mother and her brothers and sisters, and her kitchen, drawing-room, and bedroom, and her smoking chimney and her memories and all that was hers, in the stern of it, slid beneath the boys' downturned faces while the whip cracked away beyond the bridge. They could see, between the whitened tarpaulins, that the deep belly of the craft was filled with clay.

"Where does that there clay come from?" asked Edwin. For not merely was he honestly struck by a sudden new curiosity, but it was meet for him to behave like a man now, and to ask manly questions.

"Runcorn," said the Sunday scornfully. "Can't you see it painted all over the boat?"

"Why do they bring clay all the way from Runcorn?"

"They don't bring it from Runcorn. They bring it from Cornwall. It comes round by sea—see?" He laughed.

"Who told you?" Edwin roughly demanded.

"Anybody knows that!" said the Sunday grandly, but always maintaining his gay smile.

"Seems devilish funny to me," Edwin murmured, after reflection, "that they should bring clay all that roundabout way just to make crocks of it here. Why should they choose just *this* place to make crocks in? I always understood——"

"Oh! Come *on*!" the Sunday cut him short. "It's blessed well one o'clock and after!"

IV

They climbed the long bank from the canal up to the Manor Farm, at which high point their roads diverged, one path leading direct to Bleakridge where Orgreave lived, and the other zigzagging down through neglected pasturage into Bursley proper. Usually they parted here without a word, taking pride in such Spartan taciturnity, and they would doubtless have done the same this morning also, though it

were fiftyfold their last walk together as two schoolboys. But an incident intervened.

"Hold on!" cried the Sunday.

To the south of them, a mile and a half off, in the wreathing mist of the Cauldon Bar Ironworks, there was a yellow gleam that even the capricious sunlight could not kill, and then two rivers of fire sprang from the gleam and ran in a thousand delicate and lovely hues down the side of a mountain of refuse. They were emptying a few tons of molten slag at the Cauldon Bar Ironworks. The two rivers hung slowly dying in the mists of smoke. They reddened and faded, and you thought they had vanished, and you could see them yet, and then they escaped the baffled eye, unless a cloud aided them for a moment against the sun; and their ephemeral but enchanting beauty had expired for ever.

"Now!" said Edwin sharply.

"One minute ten seconds," said the Sunday, who had snatched out his watch, an inestimable contrivance with a centre-seconds hand. "By Jove! That was a good 'un."

A moment later two smaller boys, both laden with satchels, appeared over the brow from the canal.

"Let's wait a jiff," said the Sunday to Edwin, and as the smaller boys showed no hurry he bawled out to them across the intervening cinder-waste: "Run!" They ran. They were his younger brothers, Johnnie and Jimmie. "Take this and hook it!" he commanded, passing the strap of his satchel over his head as they came up. In fatalistic silence they obeyed the smiling tyrant.

"What are you going to do?" Edwin asked.

"I'm coming down your way a bit."

"But I thought you said you were peckish."

"I shall eat three slices of beef instead of my usual brace," said the Sunday carelessly.

Edwin was touched. And the Sunday was touched, because he knew he had touched Edwin. After all, this was a solemn occasion. But neither would overtly admit that its solemnity had affected him. Hence, first one and then the other began to skim stones with vicious force over the surface of the largest of the three ponds that gave interest to the Manor Farm. When they had thus proved to themselves that the day

differed in no manner from any other breaking-up day, they went forward.

On their left were two pitheads whose double wheels revolved rapidly in smooth silence, and the puffing engine-house and all the trucks and gear of a large ironstone mine. On their right was the astonishing farm, with barns and ricks and cornfields complete, seemingly quite unaware of its forlorn oddness in that foul arena of manufacture. In front, on a little hill in the vast valley, was spread out the Indian-red architecture of Bursley—tall chimneys and rounded ovens, schools, the new scarlet market, the grey tower of the old church, the high spire of the evangelical church, the low spire of the church of genuflexions, and the crimson chapels, and rows of little red houses with amber chimney-pots, and the gold angel of the blackened Town Hall topping the whole. The sedate reddish browns and reds of the composition, all netted in flowing scarves of smoke, harmonized exquisitely with the chill blues of the chequered sky. Beauty was achieved, and none saw it.

The boys descended without a word through the brick-strewn pastures, where a horse or two cropped the short grass. At the railway bridge, which carried a branch mineral line over the path, they exchanged a brief volley of words with the working-lads who always played pitch-and-toss there in the dinner-hour; and the Sunday added to the collection of shawds and stones lodged on the under ledges of the low iron girders. A strange boy, he had sworn to put ten thousand stones on those ledges before he died, or perish in the attempt. Hence Edwin sometimes called him 'Old Perish-in-the-attempt.' A little farther on the open gates of a manufactory disclosed six men playing the noble game of rinkers on a smooth patch of ground near the weighing machine. These six men were Messieurs Ford, Carter, and Udall, the three partners owning the works, and three of their employees. They were celebrated marble-players, and the boys stayed to watch them as, bending with one knee almost touching the earth, they shot the rinkers from their stubby thumbs with a canon-like force and precision that no boy could ever hope to equal. "By gum!" mumbled Edwin involuntarily, when an impossible shot was accomplished; and the bearded

shooter, pleased by this tribute from youth, twisted his white apron into a still narrower ring round his waist. Yet Edwin was not thinking about the game. He was thinking about a battle that lay before him, and how he would be weakened in the fight by the fact that in the last school examination, Charlie Orgreave, younger than himself by a year, had ousted him from the second place in the school. The report in his pocket said: "Position in class next term: third"; whereas he had been second since the beginning of the year. There would of course be no 'next term' for him, but the report remained. A youth who has come to grips with that powerful enemy, his father, cannot afford to be handicapped by even such a trifle as a report entirely irrelevant to the struggle.

Suddenly Charlie Orgreave gave a curt nod, and departed, in nonchalant good-humour, doubtless considering that to accompany his chum any farther would be to be guilty of girlish sentimentality. And Edwin nodded with equal curtness and made off slowly into the maze of Bursley. The thought in his heart was: "I'm on my own, now. I've got to face it now, by myself." And he felt that not merely his father, but the leagued universe, was against him.

CHAPTER II

THE FLAME

I

THE various agencies which society has placed at the disposal of a parent had been at work on Edwin in one way or another for at least a decade, in order to equip him for just this very day when he should step into the world. The moment must therefore be regarded as dramatic, the first crucial moment of an experiment long and elaborately prepared. Knowledge was admittedly the armour and the weapon of one about to try conclusions with the world, and many people for many years had been engaged in providing Edwin with knowledge. He had received, in fact, 'a good education'—or even, as some said, 'a thoroughly sound education'; assuredly as complete an equipment of knowledge as could be obtained in the county, for the curriculum of the Oldcastle High School was less in accord with common sense than that of the Middle School.

He knew, however, nothing of natural history, and in particular of himself, of the mechanism of the body and mind, through which his soul had to express and fulfil itself. Not one word of information about either physiology or psychology had ever been breathed to him, nor had it ever occurred to anyone around him that such information was needful. And as no one had tried to explain to him the mysteries which he carried about with him inside that fair skin of his, so no one had tried to explain to him the mysteries by which he was hemmed in, either mystically through religion, or rationally through philosophy. Never in chapel or at Sunday school had a difficulty been genuinely faced. And as for philosophy, he had not the slightest conception of what it meant. He imagined that a philosopher was one who made the best of a bad job, and he had never heard the word used in any other

sense. He had great potential intellectual curiosity, but nobody had thought to stimulate it by even casually telling him that the finest minds of humanity had been trying to systematize the mysteries for quite twenty-five centuries. Of physical science he had been taught nothing, save a grotesque perversion to the effect that gravity was a force which drew things towards the centre of the earth. In the matter of chemistry it had been practically demonstrated to him scores of times, so that he should never forget this grand basic truth that sodium and potassium may be relied upon to fizz flamingly about on a surface of water. Of geology he was perfectly ignorant, though he lived in a district whose whole livelihood depended on the scientific use of geological knowledge, and though the existence of Oldcastle itself was due to a freak of the earth's crust which geologists call a 'fault.'

II

Geography had been one of his strong points. He was aware of the rivers of Asia in their order, and of the principal products of Uruguay ; and he could name the capitals of nearly all the United States. But he had never been instructed for five minutes in the geography of his native county, of which he knew neither the boundaries nor the rivers nor the terrene characteristics. He could have drawn a map of the Orinoco, but he could not have found the Trent in a day's march ; he did not even know where his drinking-water came from. That geographical considerations are the cause of all history had never been hinted to him, nor that history bears immediately upon modern life and bore on his own life. For him history hung unsupported and unsupporting in the air. In the course of his school career he had several times approached the nineteenth century, but it seemed to him that for administrative reasons he was always being dragged back again to the Middle Ages. Once his form had 'got' as far as the infancy of his own father, and concerning this period he had learnt that 'great dissatisfaction prevailed among the labouring classes, who were led to believe by mischievous demagogues,' etc. But the next term he was recoiling round Henry the Eighth, who 'was a skilful warrior and politician,' but 'unfortunate in his domestic relations' ; and so to Eliza-

beth, than whom 'few sovereigns have been so much belied, but her character comes out unscathed after the closest examination.' History indeed resolved itself into a series of more or less sanguinary events arbitrarily grouped under the names of persons who had to be identified with the assistance of numbers. Neither of the development of national life, nor of the clash of nations, did he really know anything that was not inessential and anecdotic. He could not remember the clauses of Magna Charta, but he knew eternally that it was signed at a place amusingly called Runnymede. And the one fact engraved on his memory about the battle of Waterloo was that it was fought on a Sunday.

And as he had acquired absolutely nothing about political economy or about logic, and was therefore at the mercy of the first agreeable sophistry that might take his fancy by storm, his unfitness to commence the business of being a citizen almost reached perfection.

III

For his personal enjoyment of the earth and air and sun and stars, and society and solitude, no preparation had been made, or dreamt of. The sentiment of nature had never been encouraged in him, or even mentioned. He knew not how to look at a landscape nor at a sky. Of plants and trees he was as exquisitely ignorant as of astronomy. It had not occurred to him to wonder why the days are longer in summer, and he vaguely supposed that the cold of winter was due to an increased distance of the earth from the sun. Still, he had learnt that Saturn had a ring, and sometimes he unconsciously looked for it in the firmament, as for a tea-tray.

Of art, and the arts, he had been taught nothing. He had never seen a great picture or statue, nor heard great orchestral or solo music; and he had no idea that architecture was an art and emotional, though it moved him in a very peculiar fashion. Of the art of English literature, or of any other literature, he had likewise been taught nothing. But he knew the meaning of a few obsolete words in a few plays of Shakespeare. He had not learnt how to express himself orally in any language, but through hard drilling he was so genuinely erudite in accident and syntax that he could parse and analyse with

superb assurance the most magnificent sentences of Milton, Virgil, and Racine. This skill, together with an equal skill in utilizing the elementary properties of numbers and geometrical figures, was the most brilliant achievement of his long apprenticeship.

And now his education was finished. It had cost his father twenty-eight shillings a term, or four guineas a year, and no trouble. In younger days his father had spent more money and far more personal attention on the upbringing of a dog. His father had enjoyed success with dogs through treating them as individuals. But it had not happened to him, nor to anybody in authority, to treat Edwin as an individual. Nevertheless it must not be assumed that Edwin's father was a callous and conscienceless brute, and Edwin a martyr of neglect. Old Clayhanger was, on the contrary, an average upright and respectable parent who had given his son a thoroughly sound education, and Edwin had had the good fortune to receive that thoroughly sound education, as a preliminary to entering the world.

IV

He was very far from realizing the imperfections of his equipment for the grand entry ; but still he was not without uneasiness. In particular the conversation incident to the canal-boat wager was disturbing him. It amazed him, as he reflected, that he should have remained, to such an advanced age, in a state of ignorance concerning the origin of the clay from which the ' crocks ' of his native district were manufactured. That the Sunday should have been able to inform him did not cause him any shame, for he guessed from the peculiar eager tone of voice in which the facts had been delivered, that the Sunday was merely retailing some knowledge recently acquired by chance. He knew all the Sunday's tones of voice ; and he also was well aware that the Sunday's brain was not on the whole better stored than his own. Further, the Sunday was satisfied with his bit of accidental knowledge. Edwin was not. Edwin wanted to know why, if the clay for making earthenware was not got in the Five Towns, the Five Towns had become the great seat of the manufacture. Why were not pots made in the South, where the

clay came from ? He could not think of any answer to this enigma, nor of any means of arriving by himself at an answer. The feeling was that he ought to have been able to arrive at the answer as at the answer to an equation.

He did not definitely blame his education ; he did not think clearly about the thing at all. But, as a woman with a vague discomfort dimly fears cancer, so he dimly feared that there might be something fundamentally unsound in this sound education of his. And he had remorse for all the shirking that he had been guilty of during all his years at school. He shook his head solemnly at the immense and nearly universal shirking that continually went on. He could only acquit three or four boys, among the hundreds he had known, of the shameful sin. And all that he could say in favour of himself was that there were many worse than Edwin Clayhanger. Not merely the boys, but the masters, were sinners. Only two masters could he unreservedly respect as having acted conscientiously up to their pretensions, and one of these was an unpleasant brute. All the clevernesses, the ingenuities, the fakes, the insincerities, the incapacities, the vanities, and the dishonesties of the rest stood revealed to him, and he judged them by the mere essential force of character alone. A schoolmaster might as well attempt to deceive God as a boy who is watching him every day with the inhuman eye of youth.

" All this must end now ! " he said to himself, meaning all that could be included in the word ' shirk.'

V

He was splendidly serious. He was as splendidly serious as a reformer. By a single urgent act of thought he would have made himself a man, and changed imperfection into perfection. He desired—and there was real passion in his desire—to do his best, to exhaust himself in doing his best, in living according to his conscience. He did not know of what he was capable, nor what he could achieve. Achievement was not the matter of his desire ; but endeavour, honest and terrific endeavour. He admitted to himself his shortcomings, and he did not underestimate the difficulties that lay before him ; but he said, thinking of his father : " Surely he'll see I mean business !

Surely he's bound to give in when he sees how much in earnest I am!" He was convinced, almost, that passionate faith could move mountainous fathers.

"I'll show 'em!" he muttered.

And he meant that he would show the world. . . . He was honouring the world; he was paying the finest homage to it. In that head of his a flame burnt that was like an altar-fire, a miraculous and beautiful phenomenon, than which nothing is more miraculous nor more beautiful over the whole earth. Whence had it suddenly sprung, that flame? After years of muddy inefficiency, of contentedness with the second-rate and the dishonest, that flame astoundingly bursts forth, from a hidden, unheeded spark that none had ever thought to blow upon. It bursts forth out of a damp jungle of careless habits and negligence that could not possibly have fed it. There is little to encourage it. The very architecture of the streets shows that environment has done naught for it: ragged brickwork, walls finished anyhow with saggars and slag; narrow uneven alleys leading to higgledy-piggledy workshops and kilns; cottages transformed into factories and factories into cottages, clumsily, hastily, because nothing matters so long as 'it will do'; everywhere something forced to fulfil, badly, the function of something else; in brief, the reign of the slovenly makeshift, shameless, filthy, and picturesque. Edwin himself seemed no tabernacle for that singular flame. He was not merely untidy and dirty—at his age such defects might have excited in a sane observer uneasiness by their absence; but his gestures and his gait were untidy. He did not mind how he walked. All his sprawling limbs were saying: "What does it matter, so long as we get there?" The angle of the slatternly bag across his shoulders was an insult to the flame. And yet the flame burned with serene and terrible pureness.

It was surprising that no one saw it passing along the mean, black, smoke-palled streets that huddle about St. Luke's Church. Sundry experienced and fat old women were standing or sitting at their cottage doors, one or two smoking cutties. But even they, who in childbed and at gravesides had been at the very core of life for long years, they, who saw more than most, could only see a fresh lad passing along, with

fair hair and a clear complexion, and gawky knees and elbows, a fierce, rapt expression on his straightforward, good-natured face. Some knew that it was 'Clayhanger's lad,' a nice-behaved young gentleman, and the spitten image of his poor mother. They all knew what a lad is—the feel of his young skin under his 'duds,' the capricious freedom of his movements, his sudden madresses and shoutings and tendernesses, and the exceeding power of his unconscious wistful charm. They could divine all that in a glance. But they could not see the mysterious and holy flame of the desire for self-perfection blazing within that tousled head. And if Edwin had suspected that anybody could indeed perceive it, he would have whipped it out for shame, though the repudiation had meant everlasting death. Such is youth in the Five Towns, if not elsewhere.

CHAPTER III

ENTRY INTO THE WORLD

I

EDWIN came steeply out of the cinder-strewn back streets by Woodisun Bank [hill] into Duck Square, nearly at the junction of Trafalgar Road and Wedgwood Street. A few yards down Woodisun Bank, cocks and hens were scurrying, with necks horizontal, from all quarters, and were even flying, to the call of a little old woman who threw grain from the top step of her porch. On the level of the narrow pavement stood an immense constable, clad in white trousers, with a gun under his arm for the killing of mad dogs ; he was talking to the woman, and their two heads were exactly at the same height. On a pair of small double gates near the old woman's cottage were painted the words, " Steam Printing Works. No admittance except on business." And from as far as Duck Square could be heard the puff-puff which proved the use of steam in this works to which idlers and mere pleasure-seekers were forbidden access.

Duck Square was one of the oldest, if the least imposing, of all the public places in Bursley. It had no traffic across it, being only a sloping rectangle, like a vacant lot, with Trafalgar Road and Wedgwood Street for its exterior sides, and no outlet on its inner sides. The buildings on those inner sides were low and humble, and, as it were, withdrawn from the world, the chief of them being the ancient Duck Inn, where the hand-bell-ringers used to meet. But Duck Square looked out upon the very birth of Trafalgar Road, that wide, straight thoroughfare, whose name dates it, which had been invented, in the lifetime of a few then living, to unite Bursley with Hanbridge. It also looked out upon the birth of several old pack-horse roads which Trafalgar Road had supplanted. One of these was Woodisun Bank, that wound slowly up hill and down

dale, apparently always choosing the longest and hardest route, to Hanbridge; and another was Aboukir Street, formerly known as Warm Lane, that reached Hanbridge in a manner equally difficult and unhurried. At the junction of Trafalgar Road and Aboukir Street stood the Dragon Hotel, once the great posting-house of the town, from which all roads started. Duck Square had watched coaches and waggons stop at and start from the Dragon Hotel for hundreds of years. It had seen the Dragon rebuilt in brick and stone, with fine bay windows on each storey, in early Georgian times, and it had seen even the new structure become old and assume the dignity of age. Duck Square could remember strings of pack-mules driven by women, 'trapesing' in zigzags down Woodisun Bank and Warm Lane, and occasionally falling, with awful smashes of the crockery they carried, in the deep, slippery, scarce passable mire of the first slants into the valley. Duck Square had witnessed the slow declension of these roads into mere streets, and slum streets at that, and the death of all mules, and the disappearance of all coaches and all neighing and prancing and whip-cracking romance; while Trafalgar Road, simply because it was straight and broad and easily graded, flourished with toll-bars and a couple of pair-horsed trams that ran on lines. And many people were proud of those cushioned trams; but perhaps they had never known that coach-drivers used to tell each other about the state of the turn at the bottom of Warm Lane (since absurdly renamed in honour of an Egyptian battle), and that Woodisun Bank (now unnoticed save by doubtful characters, policemen, and schoolboys) was once regularly 'taken' by four horses at a canter. The history of human manners is crunched and embedded in the very macadam of that part of the borough, and the burgesses unheedingly tread it down every day and talk gloomily about the ugly smoky prose of industrial manufacture. And yet the Dragon Hotel, safely surviving all revolutions by the mighty virtue and attraction of ale, stands before them to remind them of the interestingness of existence.

II

At the southern corner of Trafalgar Road and Wedgwood Street, with Duck Square facing it, the Dragon Hotel and Warm Lane to its right, and Woodisun Bank creeping inconspicuously down to its left, stood a three-storey building consisting of house and shop, the frontage being in Wedgwood Street. Over the double-windowed shop was a discreet sign-board in gilt letters, "D. Clayhanger, Printer and Stationer," but above the first floor was a later and much larger sign, with the single word, "Steam-printing." All the brickwork of the façade was painted yellow, and had obviously been painted yellow many times; the woodwork of the plate-glass windows was a very dark green approaching black. The upper windows were stumpy, almost square, some dirty and some clean and curtained, with prominent sills and architraves. The line of the projecting spouting at the base of the roof was slightly curved through subsidence; at either end of the roof-ridge rose twin chimneys each with three salmon-coloured chimney-pots. The gigantic word 'Steam-printing' could be seen from the windows of the Dragon, from the porch of the big Wesleyan chapel higher up the slope, from the Conservative Club and the playground at the top of the slope; and as for Duck Square itself it could see little else. The left-hand shop window was alluringly set out with the lighter apparatus of writing and reading, and showed incidentally several rosy pictures of ideal English maidens; that to the right was grim and heavy with ledgers, inks, and variegated specimens of steam-printing.

III

In the wedge-shaped doorway between the windows stood two men, one middle-aged and one old, one bareheaded and the other with a beaver hat, engaged in conversation. They were talking easily, pleasantly, with free gestures, the younger looking down in deferential smiles at the elder, and the elder looking up benignantly at the younger. You could see that, having begun with a business matter, they had quitted it for a topic of the hour. But business none the less went forward, the shop functioned, the presses behind the shop were being

driven by steam as advertised ; a customer emerged, and was curtly nodded at by the proprietor as he squeezed past ; a girl with a small flannel apron over a large cotton apron went timidly into the shop. The trickling, calm commerce of a provincial town was proceeding, bit being added to bit and item to item, until at the week's end a series of apparent nothings had swollen into the livelihood of near half a score of people. And nobody perceived how interesting it was, this interchange of activities, this ebb and flow of money, this sluggish rise and fall of reputations and fortunes, stretching out of one century into another and towards a third ! Printing had been done at that corner, though not by steam, since the time of the French Revolution. Bibles and illustrated herbals had been laboriously produced by hand at that corner, and hawked on the backs of asses all over the county ; and nobody heard romance in the puffing of the hidden steam-engine multiplying catalogues and billheads on the self-same spot at the rate of hundreds an hour.

The younger and bigger of the two men chatting in the doorway was Darius Clayhanger, Edwin's father, and the first printer to introduce steam into Bursley. His age was then under forty-five, but he looked more. He was dressed in black, with an ample shirt-front and a narrow black cravat tied in an angular bow ; the wristbands were almost tight on the wrists, and, owing to the shortness of the alpaca coat-sleeves, they were very visible even as Darius Clayhanger stood, with his two hands deep in the horizontal pockets of his ' full-fall ' trousers. They were not precisely dirty, these wristbands, nor was the shirt-front, nor the turned-down pointed collar, but all the linen looked as though it would scarcely be wearable the next day. Clayhanger's linen invariably looked like that, not dirty and not clean ; and further, he appeared to wear eternally the same suit, ever on the point of being done for and never being done for. The trousers always had marked transverse creases ; the waistcoat always showed shiningly the outline of every article in the pockets thereof, and it always had a few stains down the front (and never more than a few), and the lowest button insecure. The coat, faintly discoloured round the collar and fretted at the cuffs, fitted him easily and loosely like the character of an old crony ; it was as if it

had grown up with him, and had expanded with his girth. His head was a little bald on the top, but there was still a great deal of mixed brown and greyish hair at the back and the sides, and the moustache, hanging straight down with an effect recalling the mouth of a seal, was plenteous and defiant—a moustache of character, contradicting the full placidity of the badly shaved chin. Darius Clayhanger had a habit, when reflective or fierce, of biting with his upper teeth as far down as he could on the lower lip; this trick added emphasis to the moustache. He stood, his feet in their clumsy boots planted firmly about sixteen inches apart, his elbows sticking out, and his head bent sideways, listening to and answering his companion with mien now eager, now roguish, now distinctly respectful.

The older man, Mr. Shushions, was apparently very old. He was one of those men of whom one says in conclusion that they are very old. He seemed to be so fully occupied all the time in conducting those physical operations which we perform without thinking of them, that each in his case became a feat. He balanced himself on his legs with conscious craft; he directed carefully his shaking and gnarled hand to his beard in order to stroke it. When he collected his thoughts into a sentence and uttered it in his weak, quavering voice, he did something wonderful; he listened closely, as though to an imperfectly acquired foreign language; and when he was not otherwise employed, he gave attention to the serious business of breathing. He wore a black silk stock, in a style even more antique than his remarkable headgear, and his trousers were very tight. He had survived into another and a more fortunate age than his own.

IV

Edwin, his heavy bag on his shoulders, found the doorway blocked by these two. He hesitated with a diffident charming smile, feeling, as he often did in front of his father, that he ought to apologize for his existence, and yet fiercely calling himself an ass for such a sentiment. Darius Clayhanger nodded at him carelessly, but not without a surprising benevolence, over his shoulder.

“This is him,” said Darius briefly.

Edwin was startled to catch a note of pride in his father's voice.

Little Mr. Shushions turned slowly and looked up at Edwin's face (for he was shorter even than the boy), and gradually acquainted himself with the fact that Edwin was the son of his father.

"Is this thy son, Darius?" he asked; and his ancient eyes were shining.

Edwin had scarcely ever heard anyone address his father by his Christian name.

Darius nodded; and then, seeing the old man's hand creeping out towards him, Edwin pulled off his cap and took the hand, and was struck by the hot smooth brittleness of the skin and the earnest tremulous weakness of the caressing grasp. Edwin had never seen Mr. Shushions before.

"Nay, nay, my boy," trembled the old man, "don't bare thy head to me . . . not to me! I'm one o' th' ould sort. Eh, I'm rare glad to see thee!" He kept Edwin's hand, and stared long at him, with his withered face transfigured by solemn emotion. Slowly he turned towards Darius, and pulled himself together. "Thou'st begotten a fine lad, Darius! . . . a fine, honest lad!"

"So—so!" said Darius gruffly, whom Edwin was amazed to see in a state of agitation similar to that of Mr. Shushions.

The men gazed at each other; Edwin looked at the ground and other unresponsive objects.

"Edwin," his father said abruptly, "run and ask Big James for th' proof of that Primitive Methodist hymn-paper; there's a good lad."

And Edwin hastened through the shadowy shop as if loosed from a captivity, and in passing threw his satchel down on a bale of goods.

v

He comprehended nothing of the encounter; neither as to the origin of the old man's status in his father's esteem, nor as to the cause of his father's strange emotion. He regarded the old man impatiently as an aged simpleton, probably over pious, certainly connected with the Primitive Methodists. His father had said 'There's a good lad' almost cajolingly. And

this was odd ; for, though nobody could be more persuasively agreeable than his father when he chose, the occasions when he cared to exert his charm, especially over his children, were infrequent, and getting more so. Edwin also saw something symbolically ominous in his being sent direct to the printing office. It was no affair of his to go to the printing office. He particularly did not want to go to the printing office.

However, he met Big James, with flowing beard and flowing apron, crossing the yard. Big James was brushing crumb from the beard.

"Father wants the proof of some hymn-paper—I don't know what," he said. "I was just coming——"

"So was I, Mister Edwin," replied Big James, in his magnificent voice, and with his curious humorous smile. And he held up a sheet of paper in his immense hand, and strode majestically on towards the shop.

Here was another detail that struck the boy. Always Big James had addressed him as 'Master Edwin' or 'Master Clayhanger.' Now it was 'Mister.' He had left school. Big James was, of course, aware of that, and Big James had enough finesse and enough gentle malice to change instantly he 'master' to 'mister.' Edwin was scarcely sure if Big James was not laughing at him. He could not help thinking that Big James had begun so promptly to call him 'mister' because the foreman compositor expected that the son of the house would at once begin to take a share in the business. He could not help thinking that his father must have so informed Big James. And all this vaguely disturbed Edwin, and reminded him of his impending battle and of the complex forces marshalled against him. And his hand, wandering in his pockets, touched that unfortunate report which stated that he had lost one place during the term.

VI

He lingered in the blue-paved yard, across which cloud-shadows swept continually, and then Big James came back and spectacularly ascended the flight of wooden steps to the printing office, and disappeared. Edwin knew that he must return to the shop to remove his bag, for his father would

assuredly reprimand him if he found it where it had been untidily left. He sidled, just like an animal, to the doorway, and then slipped up to the counter, behind the great mahogany case of 'artists' materials.' His father and the old man were within the shop now, and Edwin overheard that they were discussing a topic that had lately been rife in religious circles, namely, Sir Henry Thompson's ingenious device for scientifically testing the efficacy of prayer,—known as the 'Prayer Gauge.' The scheme was to take certain hospitals and to pray for the patients in particular wards, leaving other wards unprayed for, and then to tabulate and issue the results.

Mr. Shushions profoundly resented the employment of such a dodge; the mere idea of it shocked him, as being blasphemous; and Darius Clayhanger deferentially and feelingly agreed with him, though Edwin had at least once heard his father refer to the topic with the amused and non-committal impartiality of a man who only went to chapel when he specially felt like going.

"I've preached in the pulpits o' our Connexion," said Mr. Shushions with solemn, quavering emotion, "for over fifty year, as *you* know. But I'd ne'er gi' out another text if Primitives had ought to do wi' such a flouting o' th' Almighty. Nay, I'd go down to my grave dumb afore God!"

He had already been upset by news of a movement that was on foot for deferring Anniversary Sermons from August to September, so that people should be more free to go away for a holiday, and collections be more fruitful. What! Put off God's ordinance, to enable chapel-members to go 'a-wake-sing'! Monstrous! Yet September was tried, in spite of Mr. Shushions, and when even September would not work satisfactorily, God's ordinance was shifted boldly to May, in order to catch people and their pockets well before the demoralization incident to holidays.

Edwin thought that his father and the mysterious old man would talk for ever, and timorously he exposed himself to obtain possession of his satchel, hoping to escape unseen. But Mr. Shushions saw him, and called him, and took his hand again.

"Eh, my boy," he said, feebly shaking the hand, "I do

pray as you'll grow up to be worthy o' your father. That's all as I pray for."

Edwin had never considered his father as an exemplar. He was a just and unmerciful judge of his father, against whom he had a thousand grievances. And in his heart he resentfully despised Mr. Shushions, and decided again that he was a simpleton, and not a very tactful one. But then he saw a round yellow tear slowly form in the red rim of the old man's eye and run crookedly down that wrinkled cheek. And his impatient scorn expired. The mere sight of him, Edwin, had brought the old man to weeping! And the tear was so genuine, so convincing, so majestic that it induced in Edwin a blank humility. He was astounded, mystified; but he was also humbled. He himself was never told, and he never learnt, the explanation of that epic tear

CHAPTER IV

THE CHILD-MAN

I

THE origin of the tear on the aged cheek of Mr. Shushions went back about forty years, and was embedded in the infancy of Darius Clayhanger.

The earliest memory of Darius Clayhanger had to do with the capital letters Q.W. and S. Even as the first steam-printer in Bursley, even as the father of a son who had received a thoroughly sound middle-class education, he never noticed a capital Q.W. or S without recalling the Widow Susan's school, where he had wonderingly learnt the significance of those complicated characters. The school consisted of the entire ground floor of her cottage, namely, one room, of which the far corner was occupied by a tiny winding staircase that led to the ancient widow's bedchamber. The furniture comprised a few low forms for scholars, a table and a chair; and there were some brilliant coloured prints on the whitewashed walls. At this school Darius acquired a knowledge of the alphabet, and from the alphabet passed to Reading-Made-Easy, and then to the Bible. He made such progress that the widow soon singled him out for honour. He was allowed the high and envied privilege of raking the ashes from under the fire-place and carrying them to the ash-pit, which ash-pit was vast and lofty, being the joint production of many cottages. To reach the summit of the ash-pit, and thence to fling backwards down its steep sides all assailants who challenged your supremacy, was a precious joy. The battles of the ash-pit, however, were not battles of giants, as no children had leisure for ash-carrying after the age of seven. A still greater honour accorded to Darius was permission to sit, during lessons, on the topmost visible step of the winding stair. The widow Susan, having taught Darius to read brilliantly, taught him to knit,

and he would knit stockings for his father, mother, and sister.

At the age of seven, his education being complete, he was summoned into the world. It is true that he could neither write nor deal with the multiplication table ; but there were always night-schools which studious adults of seven and upwards might attend if business permitted. Further, there was the Sunday school, which Darius had joyously frequented since the age of three, and which he had no intention of leaving. As he grew older the Sunday school became more and more enchanting to him. Sunday morning was the morning which he lived for during six days ; it was the morning when his hair was brushed and combed, and perfumed with a delightful oil, whose particular fragrance he remembered throughout his life. At Sunday school he was petted and caressed. His success at Sunday school was shining. He passed over the heads of bigger boys, and at the age of six he was in a Bible class.

Upon hearing that Darius was going out into the world, the superintendent of the Sunday school, a grave whiskered young man of perhaps thirty, led him one morning out of the body of the Primitive Methodist Chapel which served as schoolroom before and after chapel service, up into the deserted gallery of the chapel, and there seated him on a stair, and knelt on the stair below him, and caressed his head, and called him a good boy, and presented him with an old battered Bible. This volume was the most valuable thing that Darius had ever possessed. He ran all the way home with it, half suffocated by his triumph. Sunday-school prizes had not then been invented. The young superintendent of the Sunday school was Mr. Shushions.

II

The man Darius was first taken to work by his mother. It was the winter of 1835, January. They passed through the market-place of the town of Turnhill, where they lived. Turnhill lies a couple of miles north of Bursley. One side of the market-place was barricaded with stacks of coal, and the other with loaves of a species of rye and straw bread. This coal and these loaves were being served out by meticulous

and haughty officials, all invisibly braided with red-tape, to a crowd of shivering, moaning, and weeping wretches, men, women and children—the basis of the population of Turnhill. Although they were all endeavouring to make a noise, they made scarcely any noise, from mere lack of strength. Nothing could be heard, under the implacable bright sky, but faint ghosts of sound, as though people were sighing and crying from within the vacuum of a huge glass bell.

The next morning, at half-past five, Darius began his career in earnest. He was 'mould-runner' to a 'muffin-maker,' a muffin being not a comestible but a small plate, fashioned by its maker on a mould. The business of Darius was to run as hard as he could with the mould, and a newly created, plate adhering thereto, into the drying-stove. This 'stove' was a room lined with shelves, and having a red-hot stove and stove-pipe in the middle. As no man of seven could reach the upper shelves, a pair of steps was provided for Darius, and up these he had to scamper. Each mould with its plate had to be leaned carefully against the wall, and if the soft clay of a new-born plate was damaged, Darius was knocked down. The atmosphere outside the stove was chill, but owing to the heat of the stove, Darius was obliged to work half naked. His sweat ran down his cheeks, and down his chest, and down his back, making white channels, and lastly it soaked his hair.

When there were no moulds to be sprinted into the drying-stove, and no moulds to be carried less rapidly out, Darius was engaged in clay-wedging. That is to say, he took a piece of raw clay weighing more than himself, cut it in two with a wire, raised one half above his head and crashed it down with all his force upon the other half, and he repeated the process until the clay was thoroughly soft and even in texture. At a later period it was discovered that hydraulic machinery could perform this operation more easily and more effectually than the brawny arms of a man of seven. At eight o'clock in the evening Darius was told that he had done enough for that day, and that he must arrive at five sharp the next morning to light the fire, before his master the muffin-maker began to work. When he inquired how he was to light the fire his master kicked him jovially on the thigh and suggested that

he should ask another mould-runner. His master was not a bad man at heart, it was said, but on Tuesdays, after Sunday and Saint Monday, masters were apt to be capricious.

Darius reached home at a quarter to nine, having eaten nothing but bread all day. Somehow he had lapsed into the child again. His mother took him on her knee, and wrapped her sacking apron round his ragged clothes, and cried over him and cried into his supper of porridge, and undressed him and put him to bed. But he could not sleep easily because he was afraid of being late the next morning.

III

And the next morning, wandering about the yards of the manufactory in a storm of icy sleet a little before five o'clock, he learnt from a more experienced companion that nobody would provide him with kindling for his fire, that on the contrary everybody who happened to be on the place at that hour would unite to prevent him from getting kindling, and that he must steal it or expect to be thrashed before six o'clock. Near them a vast kiln of ware in process of firing showed a white flaming glow at each of its mouths in the black winter darkness. Darius's mentor crept up to the archway of the great hovel which protected the kiln, and pointed like a conspirator to the figure of the guardian fireman dozing near his monster. The boy had the handle-less remains of an old spade, and with it he crept into the hovel, dangerously abstracted fire from one of the scorching mouths, and fled therewith, and the fireman never stirred. Then Darius, to whom the mentor kindly lent his spade, attempted to do the same, but being inexpert woke the fireman, who held him spell-bound by his roaring voice and then flung him like a sack of potatoes bodily into the slush of the yard, and the spade after him. Happily the mentor, whose stove was now alight, lent fire to Darius, so that Darius's stove too was cheerfully burning when his master came. And Darius was too excited to feel fatigue.

By six o'clock on Saturday night Darius had earned a shilling for his week's work. But he could only possess himself of the shilling by going to a magnificent public-house with his master the muffin-maker. This was the first time

that he had ever been inside a public-house. The place was crowded with men, women, and children eating the most lovely hot rolls and drinking beer, in an atmosphere exquisitely warm. And behind a high counter a stout jolly man was counting piles and piles and piles of silver. Darius's master, in company with other boys' masters, gave this stout man four sovereigns to change, and it was an hour before he changed them. Meanwhile Darius was instructed that he must eat a roll like the rest, together with cheese. Never had he tasted anything so luscious. He had a match with his mentor, as to which of them could spin out his roll the longer, honestly chewing all the time ; and he won. Some one gave him half a glass of beer. At half-past seven he received his shilling, which consisted of a sixpenny-piece and four pennies ; and, leaving the gay public-house, pushed his way through a crowd of tearful women with babies in their arms at the doors, and went home. And such was the attraction of the Sunday school that he was there the next morning, with scented hair, two minutes before the opening.

IV

In about a year Darius's increasing knowledge of the world enabled him to rise in it. He became a handle-maker in another manufactory, and also he went about with the pride of one who could form the letters of the alphabet with a pen. In his new work he had to put a bit of clay between two moulds and then force the top mould on to the bottom one by means of his stomach, which it was necessary to press downwards and at the same time to wriggle with a peculiar movement. The workman to whom he was assigned, his new 'master,' attached these handles, with strange rapid skill, to beer-mugs. For Darius the labour was much lighter than that of mould-running and clay-wedging, and the pay was somewhat higher. But there were minor disadvantages. He descended by twenty steps to his toil, and worked in a long cellar which never received any air except by way of the steps and a passage, and never any daylight at all. Its sole illumination was a stove used for drying. The 'throwers' and the 'turners' rooms were also subterranean dungeons. When in full activity all these stinking cellars were full of men,

boys, and young women, working close together in a hot twilight. Certain boys were trained contrabandists of beer, and beer came as steadily into the dungeons as though it had been laid on by a main pipe. It was not honourable, even on the part of a young woman, to refuse beer, particularly when the beer happened to arrive in the late afternoon. On such occasions young men and women would often entirely omit to go home of a night, and seasoned men of the world aged eight, on descending into the dungeons early the next morning, would have a full view of pandemonium, and they would witness during the day salutary scenes of remorse, and proofs of the existence of a profound belief in the homœopathic properties of beer.

But perhaps the worst drawback of Darius's new position was the long and irregular hours, due partly to the influences of Saint Monday and of the scenes above indicated but not described, and partly to the fact that the employees were on piece-work and entirely unhampered by grandmotherly legislation. The result was that six days' work was generally done in four. And as the younger the workman the earlier he had to start in the morning, Darius saw scarcely enough of his bed. It was not of course to be expected that a self-supporting man of the world should rigorously confine himself to an eight-hour day or even a twelve-hour day, but Darius's day would sometimes stretch to eighteen and nineteen hours: which on hygienic grounds could not be unreservedly defended.

v

One Tuesday evening his master, after three days of debauch, ordered him to be at work at three o'clock the next morning. He quickly and even eagerly agreed, for he was already intimate with his master's rope-lash. He reached home at ten o'clock on an autumn night, and went to bed and to sleep. He woke up with a start, in the dark. There was no watch or clock in the house, from which nearly all the furniture had gradually vanished, but he knew it must be already after three o'clock; and he sprang up and rushed out. Of course he had not undressed; his life was too strenuous for mere formalities. The stars shone above him as he ran

along, wondering whether after all, though late, he could by unprecedented effort make the ordained number of handles before his master tumbled into the cellar at five o'clock.

When he had run a mile he met some sewage men on their rounds, who in reply to his question told him that the hour was half after midnight. He dared not risk a return to home and bed, for within two and a half hours he must be at work. He wandered aimlessly over the surface of the earth until he came to a tile-works, more or less unenclosed, whose primitive ovens showed a glare. He ventured within, and in spite of himself sat down on the ground near one of those heavenly ovens. And then he wanted to get up again, for he could feel the strong breath of his enemy, sleep. But he could not get up. In a state of terror he yielded himself to his enemy. Shameful cowardice on the part of a man now aged nine! God, however, is merciful, and sent to him an angel in the guise of a night-watchman, who kicked him into wakefulness and off the place. He ran on limping, beneath the stellar systems, and reached his work at half-past four o'clock.

Although he had never felt so exhausted in his long life, he set to work with fury. Useless! When his master arrived he had scarcely got through the preliminaries. He dully faced his master in the narrow stifling cellar, lit by candles impaled on nails and already peopled by the dim figures of boys, girls, and a few men. His master was of taciturn habit and merely told him to kneel down. He knelt. Two bigger boys turned hastily from their work to snatch a glimpse of the affair. The master moved to the back of the cellar and took from a box a piece of rope an inch thick and clogged with clay. At the same moment a companion offered him, in silence, a tin with a slim neck, out of which he drank deep; it contained a pint of porter owing on loan from the previous day. When the master came in due course with the rope to do justice upon the sluggard he found the lad fallen forward and breathing heavily and regularly. Darius had gone to sleep. He was awakened with some violence, but the public opinion of the dungeon saved him from a torn shirt and a bloody back.

This was Darius's last day on a pot-bank. The next

morning he and his went in procession to the Bastille, as the place was called. His father, having been too prominent and too independent in a strike, had been black-listed by every manufacturer in the district : and Darius, though nine, could not keep the family.

CHAPTER V

MR. SHUSHIONS'S TEAR EXPLAINED

I

THE Bastille was on the top of a hill about a couple of miles long, and the journey thither was much lengthened by the desire of the family to avoid the main road. They were all intensely ashamed ; Darius was ashamed to tears, and did not know why ; even his little sister wept and had to be carried, not because she was shoeless and had had nothing to eat, but because she was going to the Ba-ba-bastille ; she had no notion what the place was. It proved to be the largest building that Darius had ever seen ; and indeed it was the largest in the district ; they stood against its steep sides like flies against a kennel. Then there was rattling of key-bunches, and the rasping voices of sour officials, who did not inquire if they would like a meal after their stroll. And they were put into a cellar and stripped and washed and dressed in other people's clothes, and then separated, amid tears. And Darius was pitched into a large crowd of other boys, all clothed like himself. He now understood the reason for shame ; it was because he could have no distinctive clothes of his own, because he had somehow lost his identity. All the boys had a sullen, furtive glance, and when they spoke it was in whispers.

In the low room where the boys were assembled there fell a silence, and Darius heard some one whisper that the celebrated boy who had run away and been caught would be flogged before supper. Down the long room ran a long table. Some one brought in three candles in tin candlesticks and set them near the end of this table. Then somebody else brought in a pickled birch-rod, dripping with the salt water from which it had been taken, and also a small square table. Then came some officials, and a clergyman, and then, surpassing

the rest in majesty, the governor of the Bastille, a terrible man. The governor made a speech about the crime of running away from the Bastille, and when he had spoken for a fair time, the clergyman talked in the same sense ; and then a captured tiger, dressed like a boy, with darting fierce eyes, was dragged in by two men, and laid face down on the square table, and four boys were commanded to step forward and hold tightly the four members of this tiger. And, his clothes having previously been removed as far as his waist, his breeches were next pulled down his legs. Then the rod was raised and it descended swishing, and blood began to flow ; but far more startling than the blood were the shrill screams of the tiger ; they were so loud and deafening that the spectators could safely converse under their shelter. The boys in charge of the victim had to cling hard and grind their teeth in the effort to keep him prone. As the blows succeeded each other, Darius became more and more ashamed. The physical spectacle did not sicken nor horrify him, for he was a man of wide experience ; but he had never before seen flogging by lawful authority. Flogging in the workshop was different, a private if sanguinary affair between free human beings. This ritualistic and cold-blooded torture was infinitely more appalling in its humiliation. The screaming grew feebler, then ceased ; then the blows ceased, and the unconscious infant (cured of being a tiger) was carried away leaving a trail of red drops along the floor.

II

After this, supper was prepared on the long table, and the clergyman called down upon it the blessing of God, and enjoined the boys to be thankful, and departed in company with the governor. Darius, who had not tasted all day, could not eat. The flogging had not nauseated him, but the bread and the skilly revolted his pampered tastes. Never had he, with all his experience, seen nor smelt anything so foully disgusting. When supper was completed, a minor official interceded with the Almighty in various ways for ten minutes, and at last the boys were marched upstairs to bed. They all slept in one room. The night also could be set down in

words, but must not be, lest the setting-down should be disastrous. . . .

Darius knew that he was ruined ; he knew that he was a workhouse boy for evermore, and that the bright freedom of sixteen hours a day in a cellar was lost to him for evermore. He was now a prisoner, branded, hopeless. He would never be able to withstand the influences that had closed around him and upon him. He supposed that he should become desperate, become a tiger, and then . . .

III

But the following afternoon he was forcibly reclothed in his own beautiful and beloved rags, and was pushed out of the Bastille, and there he saw his pale father and his mother, and his little sister, and another man. And his mother was on her knees in the cold autumn sunshine, and hysterically clasping the knees of the man, and weeping ; and the man was trying to raise her, and the man was weeping too. Darius wept. The man was Mr. Shushions. Somehow, in a way that Darius comprehended not, Mr. Shushions had saved them. Mr. Shushions, in a beaver tall-hat and with an apron rolled round his waist under his coat, escorted them back to their house, into which some fresh furniture had been brought. And Darius knew that a situation was waiting for his father. And further, Mr. Shushions, by his immense mysterious power, found a superb situation for Darius himself as a printer's devil. All this because Mr. Shushions, as superintendent of a Sunday school, was emotionally interested in the queer, harsh boy who had there picked up the art of writing so quickly.

Such was the origin of the tear that ran down Mr. Shushions's cheek when he beheld Edwin, well-nourished, well-dressed and intelligent, the son of Darius the successful steam-printer. Mr. Shushions's tear was the tear of the creator looking upon his creation and marvelling at it. Mr. Shushions loved Darius as only the benefactor can love the benefited. He had been out of the district for over thirty years, and, having returned there to die, the wonder of what he had accomplished by merely saving a lad from the certain perdition of a prolonged stay in the workhouse, struck him blindly in the face and dazzled him.

Darius had never spoken to a soul of his night in the Bastille. All his infancy was his own fearful secret. His life, seen whole, had been a miracle. But none knew that except himself and Mr. Shushions. Assuredly Edwin never even faintly suspected it. To Edwin Mr. Shushions was nothing but a feeble and tedious old man.

CHAPTER VI IN THE HOUSE

I

TO return to Edwin. On that Friday afternoon of the breaking-up he was, in the local phrase, at a loose end. That is, he had no task, no programme, and no definite desires. Not knowing, when he started out in the morning, whether school would formally end before or after the dinner-hour, he had taken his dinner with him, as usual, and had eaten it at Oldcastle. Thus, though the family dinner had not begun when he reached home, he had no share in it, partly because he was not hungry, and partly because he was shy about having left school. The fact that he had left school affected him as he was affected by the wearing of a new suit for the first time, or by the cutting of his hair after a prolonged neglect of the barber. It inspired him with a wish to avoid his kind, and especially his sisters, Maggie and Clara. Clara might make some facetious remark. Edwin could never forget the Red Indian glee with which Clara had danced round him when for the first time—and quite unprepared for the exquisite shock—she had seen him in long trousers. There was also his father. He wanted to have a plain talk with his father—he knew that he would not be at peace until he had had that talk—and yet in spite of himself he had carefully kept out of his father's way during all the afternoon, save for a moment when, strolling with affected nonchalance up to Darius's private desk in the shop, he had dropped thereon his school report, and strolled off again.

Towards six o'clock he was in his bedroom, an attic with a floor very much more spacious than its ceiling, and a window that commanded the slope of Trafalgar Road towards Bleak-ridge. It had been his room, his castle, his sanctuary, for

at least ten years, since before his mother's death of cancer. He did not know that he loved it, with all its inconveniences and makeshifts ; but he did love it, and he was jealous for it ; no one should lay a hand on it to rearrange what he had once arranged. His sisters knew this ; the middle-aged servant knew it ; even his father, with a curt laugh, would humorously acquiesce in the theory of the sacredness of Edwin's bedroom. As for Edwin, he saw nothing extraordinary in his attitude concerning his bedroom ; and he could not understand, and he somewhat resented, that the household should perceive anything comic in it. He never went near his sisters' bedroom, never wished to go near it, never thought about it.

II

Now he sat idly on the patchwork counterpane of his bed and gazed at the sky. He was feeling a little happier, a little less unsettled, for his stomach was empty and his mind had begun to fix itself with pleasure on the images of hot toast and jam. He 'wanted his tea': the manner in which he glanced at his old silver watch proved that. He wished only that before six o'clock struck he could settle upon the necessary changes in his bedroom. A beautiful schooner, which for over a year, with all sails spread, had awaited the breeze in a low dark corner to the right of the window, would assuredly have to be dismissed to the small, empty attic. Once that schooner had thrilled him ; the slight rake of its masts and the knotted reality of its rigging had thrilled him ; and to navigate it had promised the most delicious sensations conceivable. Now, one moment it was a toy as silly as a doll, and the next moment it thrilled him once more, and he could believe again its promises of bliss — and then he knew that it was for ever a vain toy, and he was sad, and his sadness was pleasure. He had already stacked most of his school-books in the other attic. He would need a table and a lamp ; he knew not for what precise purpose ; but a table and a lamp were necessary to the continuance of his self-respect. The only question was, Should he remodel his bedroom, or should he demand the other attic, and plant his flag in it and rule over it in addition to his bedroom ? Had he the initiative

and the energy to carry out such an enterprise? He was not able to make up his mind. And, moreover, he could not decide anything until after that plain talk with his father.

His sister Clara's high voice sounded outside, on the landing, or half-way up the attic stairs.

"Ed-win! Ed-win!"

"What's up?" he called in answer, rising with a nervous start. The door of the room was unlatched.

"You're mighty mysterious in your bedroom," said Clara's voice behind the door.

"Come in! Come in! Why don't you come in?" he replied, with good-natured impatience. But somehow he could not speak in a natural tone. The mere fact that he had left school that day and that the world awaited him, and that everybody in the house knew this, rendered him self-conscious.

III

Clara entered, with a curious sidelong movement, half-winning and half-serpentine. She was aged fourteen, a very fair and very slight girl, with a thin face and thin lips, and extraordinarily slender hands; in general appearance fragile. She wore a semicircular comb on the crown of her head, and her abundant hair hung over her shoulders in two tight pig-tails. Edwin considered that Clara was harsh and capricious; he had much fault to find with her; but nevertheless the sight of her usually affected him pleasantly (of course without his knowing it), and he never for long sat definitely in adverse judgment upon her. Her gestures had a charm for him which he felt but did not realize. And this charm was similar to his own charm. But nothing would have so surprised him as to learn that he himself had any charm at all. He would have laughed, and been ashamed—to hear that his gestures and the play of his features had an ingratiating, awkward, and wistful grace; he would have tried to cure that.

"Father wants you," said Clara, her hand on the handle of the thin attic-door hung with odd garments.

Edwin's heart fell instantly, and all the agreeable images of tea vanished from his mind. His father must have read the

school report and perceived that Edwin had been beaten by Charlie Orgreave, a boy younger than himself!

"Did he send you up for me?" Edwin asked.

"No," said Clara, frowning. "But I heard him calling out for you all over. So Maggie told me to run up. Not that I expect any *thanks*." She put her head forward a little.

The episode, and Clara's tone, showed clearly the nature and force of the paternal authority in the house. It was an authority with the gift of getting its commands anticipated.

"All right! I'm coming," said Edwin superiorly.

"I know what you want," Clara said teasingly as she turned towards the passage.

"What do I want?"

"You want the empty attic all to yourself, and a fine state it would be in in a month, my word!"

"How do you know I want the empty attic?" Edwin repelled the onslaught; but he was considerably taken aback. It was a mystery to him how those girls, and Clara in particular, got wind of his ideas before he had even formulated them definitely to himself. It was also a mystery to him how they could be so tremendously interested in matters which did not concern them.

"You never mind!" Clara gibed, with a smile that was malicious, but charmingly malicious. "I know!"

She had merely seen him staring into the empty attic, and from that brief spectacle she had by divination constructed all his plans.

IV

The Clayhanger sitting-room, which served as both dining-room and drawing-room, according to the more primitive practices of those days, was over one half of the shop, and looked on Duck Square. Owing to its northern aspect it scarcely ever saw the sun. The furniture followed the universal fashion of horsehair, mahogany, and wool embroidery. There was a piano, with a high back—fretted wood over silk pleated in rays from the centre; a bookcase whose lower part was a cupboard; a sofa; and a large leather easy chair which did not match the rest of the room. This easy chair had its back to the window and its front legs a little towards the fire-place,

so that Mr. Clayhanger could read his newspaper with facility in daytime. At night the light fell a little awkwardly from the central chandelier, and Mr. Clayhanger, if he happened to be reading, would continually shift his chair an inch or two to left or right, backwards or forwards, and would also continually glance up at the chandelier, as if accusing it of not doing its best. A common sight in the sitting-room was Mr. Clayhanger balanced on a chair, the table having been pushed away, screwing the newest burner into the chandelier. When he was seated in his easy chair the piano could not be played, because there was not sufficient space for the stool between the piano and his chair; nor could the fire be made up without disturbing him, because the japanned coal-box was on the same side of the hearthrug as the chair. Thus, when the fire languished and Mr. Clayhanger neglected it, the children had either to ask permission to step over his legs, or suggest that he should attend to the fire himself. Occasionally, when he was in one of his gay moods, he would humorously impede the efforts of the fire-maker with his feet, and if the fire-maker was Clara or Edwin, the child would tickle him, which brought him to his senses and forced him to shout: "None o' that! None o' that!"

The position of Mr. Clayhanger's easy chair—a detail apparently trifling—was in reality a strongly influencing factor in the family life, for it meant that the father's presence obsessed the room. And it could not be altered, for it depended on the window; the window was too small to be quite efficient. When the children reflected upon the history of their childhood they saw one important aspect of it as a long series of detached hours spent in the sitting-room, in a state of desire to do something that could not be done without disturbing father, and in a state of indecision whether or not to disturb him. If by chance, as sometimes occurred, he chose to sit on the sofa, which was unobtrusive in the corner away from the window, between the fire-place and the door, the room was instantly changed into something larger, freer, and less inconvenient.

V

As the hour was approaching six, Edwin, on the way downstairs, looked in at the sitting-room for his father ; but Darius was not there.

"Where's father?" he demanded.

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Maggie, at the sewing-machine. Maggie was aged twenty ; dark, rather stout, with an expression at once benevolent and worried. She rarely seemed to belong to the same generation as her brother and sister. She consorted on equal terms with married women, and talked seriously of the same things as they did. Mr. Clayhanger treated her somewhat differently from the other two. Yet, though he would often bid them accept her authority, he would now and then impair that authority by roughly 'dressing her down' at the meal-table. She was a capable girl ; she had much less firmness, and much more good-nature, than she seemed to have. She could not assert herself adequately. She 'managed' very well ; indeed she had 'done wonders' in filling the place of the mother who had died when Clara was four and Edwin six, and she herself only ten. Responsibility, apprehension, and strained effort had printed their marks on her features. But the majority of acquaintances were more impressed by her good intention than by her capacity ; they would call her 'a nice thing.' The discerning minority, while saying with admiring conviction that she was 'a very fine girl,' would regret that somehow she had not the faculty of 'making the best of herself,' of 'putting her best foot foremost.' And would they not heartily stand up for her with the superficial majority !

A thin, grey-haired, dreamy-eyed woman hurried into the room, bearing a noisy tray and followed by Clara with a white cloth. This was Mrs. Nixon, the domestic staff of the Clayhanger household for years. Clara and Mrs. Nixon swept Maggie's sewing materials from the corner of the table on to a chair, put Maggie's flower-glasses on to the ledge of the bookcase, folded up the green cloth, and began rapidly to lay the tea. Simultaneously Maggie, glancing at the clock, closed up her sewing-machine, and deposited her work in a basket. Clara, leaving the table, stooped to pick up the

bits of cotton and white stuff that littered the carpet. The clock struck six.

"Now, sharp!" she exclaimed curtly to Edwin, who stood hesitatingly with his hands in his pockets. "Can't you help Maggie to push that sewing-machine into the corner?"

"What on earth's up?" he inquired vaguely, but starting forward to help Maggie.

"*She'll* be here in a minute," said Maggie, almost under her breath, as she fitted on the cover of the sewing-machine.

"Who?" asked Edwin. "Oh! Auntie! I'd forgotten it was her night."

"As if anyone could forget!" murmured Clara, with sarcastic unbelief.

By this time the table was completely set.

VI

Edwin wondered mildly, as he often wondered, at the extremely bitter tone in which Clara always referred to their Aunt Clara Hamps,—when Mrs. Hamps was not there. Even Maggie's private attitude to Auntie Clara was scarcely more Christian. Mrs. Hamps was the widowed younger sister of their mother, and she had taken a certain share in the supervision of Darius Clayhanger's domestic affairs after the death of Mrs. Clayhanger. This latter fact might account, partially but not wholly, for the intense and steady dislike in which she was held by Maggie, Clara, and Mrs. Nixon. Clara hated her own name because she had been 'called after' her auntie. Mr. Clayhanger 'got on' excellently with his sister-in-law. He 'thought highly' of her, and was indeed proud to have her for a relative. In their father's presence the girls never showed their dislike of Mrs. Hamps; it was a secret pleasure shared between them and Mrs. Nixon, and only disclosed to Edwin because the girls were indifferent to what Edwin might think. They casually despised him for somehow liking his auntie, for not seeing through her wiles; but they could count on his loyalty to themselves.

"Are you ready for tea, or aren't you?" Clara asked him. She frequently spoke to him as if she was the elder instead of the younger.

“ Yes,” he said. “ But I must find father.”

He went off, but he did not find his father in the shop, and after a few futile minutes he returned upstairs. Mrs. Nixon preceded him, carrying the tea-urn, and she told him that his father had sent word into the kitchen that they were not to ‘ wait tea ’ for him.

CHAPTER VII

AUNTIE HAMPS

I

MRS. HAMPS had splendidly arrived. The atmosphere of the sitting-room was changed. Maggie, smiling, wore her second-best black silk apron. Clara, smiling and laughing, wore a clean long white pinafore. Mrs. Nixon, with her dreamy eyes less vacant than usual, greeted Mrs. Hamps effusively, and effusively gave humble thanks for kind inquiries after her health. A stranger might have thought that these women were strongly attached to one another by ties of affection and respect. Edwin never understood how his sisters, especially Maggie, could practise such vast and eternal hypocrisy with his aunt. As for him, his aunt acted on him now, as generally, like a tonic. Some effluence from her quickened him. He put away the worry in connection with his father, and gave himself up to the physical pleasures of tea.

Aunt Clara was a handsome woman. She had been called—but not by men whose manners and code she would have approved—‘a damned fine woman.’ Her age was about forty, which at that period, in a woman’s habit of mind, was the equivalent of about fifty to-day. Her latest photograph was considered to be very successful. It showed her standing behind a velvet chair and leaning her large but still shapely bust slightly over the chair. Her forearms, ruffled and braceleted, lay along the fringed back of the chair, and from one negligent hand depended a rose. A heavy curtain came downwards out of nothing into the picture, and the end of it lay coiled and draped on the seat of the chair. The great dress was of slate-coloured silk, with sleeves tight to the elbow, and thence, from a ribbon-bow, broadening to a wide, triangular climax that revealed quantities of lace at the

wrists. The pointed ends of the sleeves were picked out with squares of velvet. A short and highly ornamental fringed and looped flounce waved grandly out behind from the waist to the level of the knees ; and the stomacher recalled the ornamentation of the flounce ; and both the stomacher and flounce gave contrasting value to the severe plainness of the skirt, designed to emphasize the quality of the silk. Round the neck was a lace collarette to match the furniture of the wrists, and the broad ends of the collarette were crossed on the bosom and held by a large jet brooch. Above that you saw a fine regular face, with a firm hard mouth and a very straight nose and dark eyebrows ; small ears weighted with heavy jet ear-rings.

The photograph could not render the clear perfection of Aunt Clara's rosy skin ; she had the colour and the flashing eye of a girl. But it did justice to her really magnificent black hair. This hair was all her own, and the coiffure seemed as ample as a judge's wig. From the low forehead the hair was parted exactly in the middle for about two inches ; then plaited bands crossed and recrossed the scalp in profusion, forming behind a pattern exceedingly complicated, and down either side of the head, now behind the ear, now hiding it, now resting on the shoulders, now hanging clear of them, fell long multitudinous glossy curls. These curls—one of them in the photograph reached as far as the stomacher—could not have been surpassed in Bursley.

She was a woman of terrific vitality. Her dead sister had been nothing in comparison with her. She had a glorious digestion, and was the envy of her brother-in-law—who suffered much from biliousness—because she could eat with perfect impunity hot buttered toast and raw celery in large quantities. Further, she had independent means, and no children to cause anxieties. Yet she was always, as the phrase went, 'bearing up,' or, as another phrase went, 'leaning hard.' Frances Ridley Havergal was her favourite author, and Frances Ridley Havergal's little book "Lean Hard" was kept on her dressing-table. (The girls, however, averred that she never opened it.) Aunt Clara's spiritual life must be imagined as a continual, almost physical leaning on Christ. Nevertheless she never complained, and

she was seldom depressed. Her desire, and her achievement, was to be bright, to take everything cheerfully, to look obstinately on the best side of things, and to instil this religion into others.

II

Thus, when it was announced that father had been called out unexpectedly, leaving an order that they were not to wait for him, she said gaily that they had better be obedient and begin, though it would have been more agreeable to wait for father. And she said how beautiful the tea was, and how beautiful the toast, and how beautiful the strawberry-jam, and how beautiful the pikelets. She would herself pour some hot water into the slop basin, and put a pikelet on a plate thereon, covered, to keep warm for father. She would not hear a word about the toast being a little hard, and when Maggie in her curious quiet way 'stuck her out' that the toast was in fact hard, she said that that precise degree of hardness was the degree which she, for herself, preferred. Then she talked of jams, and mentioned gooseberry-jam, whereupon Clara privately put her tongue out, with the quickness of a snake, to signal to Maggie.

"Ours isn't good this year," said Maggie.

"I told auntie we weren't so set up with it, a fortnight ago," said Clara simply, like a little angel.

"Did you, dear?" Mrs. Hamps exclaimed, with great surprise, almost with shocked surprise. "I'm sure it's beautiful. I was quite looking forward to tasting it; quite! I know what your gooseberry-jam is."

"Would you like to try it now?" Maggie suggested. "But we've warned you."

"Oh, I don't want to trouble you *now*. We're all so cosy here. Any time——"

"No trouble, auntie," said Clara, with her most captivating and innocent smile.

"Well, if you talk about 'warning' me, of course I must insist on having some," said Auntie Clara.

Clara jumped up, passed behind Mrs. Hamps, making a contemptuous face at those curls as she did so, and ran gracefully down to the kitchen.

"Here," she said crossly to Mrs. Nixon. "A pot of that gooseberry, please. A small one will do. She knows it's short of sugar, and so she's determined to try it, just out of spite; and nothing will stop her."

Clara returned smiling to the tea-table, and Maggie neatly unsealed the jam; and Auntie Clara, with a face beaming with pleasurable anticipation, helped herself circumspectly to a spoonful.

"Beautiful!" she murmured.

"Don't you think it's a bit tart?" Maggie asked.

"Oh no!" protestingly.

"*Don't* you?" asked Clara, with an air of delighted deferential astonishment.

"Oh *no*!" Mrs. Hamps repeated. "It's beautiful!" She did not smack her lips over it, because she would have considered it unladylike to smack her lips, but by less offensive gestures she sought to convey her unbounded pleasure in the jam. "How much sugar did you put in?" she inquired after a while. "Half and half?"

"Yes," said Maggie.

"They do say gooseberries were a tiny bit sour this year, owing to the weather," said Mrs. Hamps reflectively.

Clara kicked Edwin under the table, as it were viciously, but her delightful innocent smile, directed vaguely upon Mrs. Hamps, did not relax. Such duplicity passed Edwin's comprehension; it seemed to him purposeless. Yet he could not quite deny that there might be a certain sting, a certain insinuation, in his auntie's last remark.

III

Then Mr. Clayhanger entered, blowing forth a long breath as if trying to repulse the oppressive heat of the July afternoon. He came straight to the table, with a slightly preoccupied air, quickly, his arms motionless at his sides, and slanting a little outwards. Mr. Clayhanger always walked like this, with motionless arms so that in spite of a rather clumsy and heavy step, the upper part of him appeared to glide along. He shook hands genially with Auntie Clara, greeting her almost as grandiosely as she greeted him, putting on for a

moment the grand manner, not without dignity. Each admired the other. Each often said that the other was 'wonderful.' Each undoubtedly flattered the other, made a fuss of the other. Mr. Clayhanger's admiration was the greater. The bitterest thing that Edwin had ever heard Maggie say was: "It's something to be thankful for that she's his deceased wife's sister!" And she had said the bitter thing with such quiet bitterness! Edwin had not instantly perceived the point of it.

Darius Clayhanger then sat down, with a thud, snatched at the cup of tea which Maggie had placed before him, and drank half of it with a considerable indrawing noise. No one asked where or why he had been detained; it was not etiquette to do so. If father had been 'called away,' or had 'had to go away,' or was 'kept somewhere,' the details were out of deference allowed to remain in mystery, respected by curiosity. . . . 'Father—business.' . . . All business was sacred. He himself had inculcated this attitude.

In a short silence the sound of the bell that the carman rang before the tram started for Hanbridge floated in through the open window.

"There's the tram!" observed Auntie Clara, apparently with warm and special interest in the phenomena of the tram. Then another little silence.

"Auntie," said Clara, writhing about youthfully on her chair.

"Can't ye sit still a bit?" the father asked, interrupting her roughly, but with good humour. "Ye'll be falling off th' chair in a minute."

Clara blushed swiftly, and stopped.

"Yes, love?" Auntie Clara encouraged her. It was as if Auntie Clara had said: "Your dear father is of course quite right, more than right, to insist on your sitting properly at table. However, do not take the correction too much to heart. I sympathize with all your difficulties."

"I was only going to ask you," Clara went on, in a weaker, stammering voice, "if you knew that Edwin's left school to-day." Her archness had deserted her.

"Mischievous little thing!" thought Edwin. "Why must she deliberately go and draw attention to that?" And he,

too, blushed, feeling as if he owed an apology to the company for having left school.

"Oh yes!" said Auntie Clara with eager benevolence. "I've got something to say about that to my nephew."

Mr. Clayhanger searched in a pocket of his alpaca, and drew forth an open envelope.

"Here's the lad's report, auntie," said he. "Happen ye'd like to look at it."

"I should indeed!" she replied fervently. "I'm sure it's a very good one."

IV

She took the paper, and assumed her spectacles.

"Conduct—Excellent," she read, poring with enthusiasm over the document. And she read again: "Conduct—Excellent." Then she went down the list of subjects, declaiming the number of marks for each; and at the end she read: "Position in class next term: Third. Splendid, Eddy!" she exclaimed.

"I thought you were second," said Clara, in her sharp manner.

Edwin blushed again, and hesitated.

"Eh? What's that? What's that?" his father demanded. "I didn't notice that. Third?"

"Charlie Orgreave beat me in the examination," Edwin muttered.

"Well, that's a pretty how d'ye do!" said his father. "Going down one! You ought to ha' been first instead o' third. And would ha' been, happen, if ye'd pegged at it."

"Now I won't have that! I won't have it!" Auntie Clara protested, laughingly showing her fine teeth and gazing first at Darius, and then at Edwin, from under her spectacles, her head being thrown back and the curls hanging far behind. "No one shall say that Edwin doesn't work, not even his father, while his auntie's about! Because I know he does work! And besides, he hasn't gone down. It says, '*position next term*'—not this term. You were still second to-day, weren't you, my boy?"

"I suppose so. Yes," Edwin answered, pulling himself together.

"Well! There you are!" Auntie Clara's voice rang triumphantly. She was opening her purse. "And *there* you are!" she repeated, popping half a sovereign down in front of him. "That's a little present from your auntie on your leaving school."

"Oh, auntie!" he cried feebly.

"Oh!" cried Clara, genuinely startled.

Mrs. Hamps was sometimes thus astoundingly munificent. It was she who had given the schooner to Edwin. And her presents of elaborately enveloped and costly toilet soap on the birthdays of the children, and at Christmas, were massive. Yet Clara always maintained that she was the meanest old thing imaginable. And Maggie had once said that she knew that Auntie Clara made her servant eat dripping instead of butter. To give inferior food to a servant was to Maggie the unforgivable in parsimony.

"Well," Mr. Clayhanger warningly inquired, "what do you say to your aunt?"

"Thank you, auntie," Edwin sheepishly responded, fingering the coin.

It was a princely sum. And she had stuck up for him famously in the matter of the report. Strange that his father should not have read the report with sufficient attention to remark the fall to third place! Anyway, that aspect of the affair was now safely over, and it seemed to him that he had not lost much prestige by it. He would still be able to argue with his father on terms not too unequal, he hoped.

V

As the tea drew to an end, and the plates of toast, bread and butter, and tea-cake grew emptier, and the slop-basin filled, and only Maggie's flowers remained fresh and immaculate amid the untidy debris of the meal; and as Edwin and Clara became gradually indifferent to jam, and then inimical to it; and as the sounds of the street took on the softer quality of summer evening, and the first filmy shades of twilight gathered imperceptibly in the corners of the room, and Mr. Clayhanger performed the ejaculations which signified that he had had enough; so Mrs. Hamps prepared herself for one of her classic outbursts of feeling.

"Well!" she said at last, putting her spoon to the left of her cup as a final indication that seriously she would drink no more. And she gave a great sigh. "School over! And the only son going out into the world! How time flies!" And she gave another great sigh, implying an immense melancholy due to this vision of the reality of things. Then she remembered her courage, and the device of leaning hard, and all her philosophy.

"But it's all for the best!" she broke forth in a new brave tone. "Everything is ordered for the best. We must never forget that! And I'm quite sure that Edwin will be a very great credit to us all, with help from above."

She proceeded powerfully in this strain. She brought in God, Christ, and even the Holy Spirit. She mentioned the dangers of the world, and the disguises of the devil, and the unspeakable advantages of a good home, and the special goodness of Mr. Clayhanger and of Maggie, yes, and of her little Clara; and the pride which they all had in Edwin, and the unique opportunities which he had of doing good, by example, and also, soon, by precept, for others younger than himself would begin to look up to him; and again her personal pride in him, and her sure faith in him; and what a solemn hour it was. . . .

Nothing could stop her. The girls loathed these exhibitions. Maggie always looked at the table during their progress, and she felt as though she had done something wrong and was ashamed of it. Clara not merely felt like a criminal—she felt like an unrepentant criminal; she blushed, she glanced nervously about the room, and all the time she repeated steadily in her heart a highly obscene word which she had heard at school. This unspoken word, hurled soundlessly but savagely at her aunt in that innocent heart, afforded much comfort to Clara in the affliction. Even Edwin, who was more lenient in all ways than his sisters, profoundly deplored these moralizings of his aunt. They filled him with a desire to run fast and far, to be alone at sea, or to be deep somewhere in the bosom of the earth. He could not understand this side of his auntie's individuality. But there was no delivery from Mrs. Hamps. The only person who could possibly have delivered them seemed to enjoy the sinister

thralldom. Mr. Clayhanger listened with appreciative and admiring nods ; he appeared to be quite sincere. And Edwin could not understand his father either. " How simple father must be ! " he thought vaguely. Whereas Clara fatalistically dismissed her father's attitude as only one more of the preposterously unreasonable phenomena which she was constantly meeting in life ; and she persevered grimly with her obscene word.

VI

" Eh ! " said Mrs. Hamps enthusiastically, after a trifling pause. " It does me good when I think what a *help* you'll be to your father in the business, with that clever head of yours."

She gazed at him fondly.

Now this was Edwin's chance. He did not wish to be any help at all to his father in the business. He had other plans for himself. He had never mentioned them before, because his father had never talked to him about his future career, apparently assuming that he would go into the business. He had been waiting for his father to begin. " Surely," he had said to himself, " father's bound to speak to me sometime about what I'm going to do, and when he does I shall just tell him." But his father never had begun ; and by timidity, negligence, and perhaps ill-luck, Edwin had thus arrived at his last day at school with the supreme question not merely unsolved but unattacked. Oh, he blamed himself ! Any ordinary boy (he thought) would have discussed such a question naturally long ago. After all, it was not a crime, it was no cause for shame, to wish not to be a printer. Yet he was ashamed ! Absurd ! He blamed himself. But he also blamed his father. Now, however, in responding to his auntie's remark, he could remedy all the past by simply and boldly stating that he did not want to follow his father. It would be unpleasant, of course, but the worst shock would be over in a moment, like the drawing of a tooth. He had merely to utter certain words. He must utter them. They were perfectly easy to say, and they were also of the greatest urgency. " I don't want to be a printer." He mumbled them over in his mind. " I don't want to be a printer."

What could it matter to his father whether he was a printer or not? Seconds, minutes, seemed to pass. He knew that if he was so inconceivably craven as to remain silent, his self-respect would never recover from the blow. Then, in response to Mrs. Hamps's prediction about his usefulness to his father in the business, he said, with a false-jaunty, unconvinced, unconvincing air—

“Well, that remains to be seen.”

This was all he could accomplish. It seemed as if he had looked death itself in the face, and drawn away.

“Remains to be *seen*?” Auntie Clara repeated, with a hint of startled pain, due to this levity.

He was mute. No one suspected, as he sat there, so boyish, wistful, and uneasily squirming, that he was agonized to the very centre of his being. All the time, in his sweating soul, he kept trying to persuade himself: “I’ve given them a hint, anyhow! I’ve given them a hint, anyhow!”

‘Them’ included everybody at the table.

VII

Mr. Clayhanger, completely ignoring Edwin’s reply to his aunt and her somewhat shocked repetition of it, turned suddenly towards his son and said, in a manner friendly but serious, a manner that assumed everything, a manner that begged the question, unconscious even that there was a question—

“I shall be out the better part o’ to-morrow. I want ye to be sure to be in the shop all afternoon—I’ll tell you what for downstairs.” It was characteristic of him thus to make a mystery of business in front of the women.

Edwin felt the net closing about him. Then he thought of one of those ‘posers’ which often present themselves to youths of his age.

“But to-morrow’s Saturday,” he said, perhaps perkily. “What about the Bible class?”

Six months previously a young minister of the Wesleyan Circuit, to whom Heaven had denied both a sense of humour and a sense of honour, had committed the infamy of starting a Bible class for big boys on Saturday afternoons. This out-

rage had appalled and disgusted the boyhood of Wesleyanism in Bursley. Their afternoon for games, their only fair afternoon in the desert of the week, to be filched from them and used against them for such an odious purpose as a Bible class ! Not only Sunday school on Sunday afternoon, but a Bible class on Saturday afternoon ! It was incredible. It was unbearable. It was gross tyranny, and nothing else. Nevertheless the young minister had his way, by dint of meanly calling upon parents and invoking their help. The scurvy worm actually got together a class of twelve to fifteen boys, to the end of securing their eternal welfare. And they had to attend the class, though they swore they never would, and they had to sing hymns, and they had to kneel and listen to prayers, and they had to listen to the most intolerable tedium, and to take notes of it. All this, while the sun was shining, or the rain was raining, on fields and streets and open spaces and ponds !

Edwin had been trapped in the snare. His father, after only three words from the young minister, had yielded up his son like a burnt sacrifice—and with a casual nonchalance that utterly confounded Edwin. In vain Edwin had pointed out to his elders that a Saturday afternoon of confinement must be bad for his health. His attention had been directed to his eternal health. In vain he had pointed out that on wet Saturday afternoons he frequently worked at his home-lessons, which therefore might suffer under the régime of a Bible class. His attention had been directed to the peace which passeth understanding. So he had been beaten, and was secretly twitted by Clara as an abject victim. Hence it was with a keen and peculiar feeling of triumph, of hopelessly cornering the inscrutable generation which a few months ago had cornered him, that he demanded, perhaps perkily : “ What about the Bible class ? ”

“ There’ll be no more Bible classing,” said his father, with a mild but slightly sardonic smile, as who should say : “ I’m ready to make all allowances for youth ; but I must get you to understand, as gently as I can, that you can’t keep on going to Bible classes for ever and ever.”

Mrs. Hamps said—

“ It won’t be as if you were at school. But I do hope you

won't neglect to study your Bible. Eh, but I do hope you'll always find time for that, to your dying day!"

"Oh—but I say——" Edwin began, and stopped.

He was beaten by the mere effrontery of the replies. His father and his aunt (the latter of whom at any rate was a firm and confessed religionist, who had been responsible for converting Mr. Clayhanger from Primitive Methodism to Wesleyan Methodism) did not trouble to defend their new position by argument. They made no effort to reconcile it with their position of a few months back, when the importance of heavenly welfare far exceeded the importance of any conceivable earthly welfare. The fact was that they had no argument. If God took precedence of knowledge and of health, he took precedence of a peddling shop! That was unanswerable.

VIII

Edwin was dashed. His faith in humanity was dashed. These elders were not sincere. And as Mrs. Hamps continued to embroider the original theme of her exhortation about the Bible, Edwin looked at her stealthily, and the doubt crossed his mind whether that majestic and vital woman was ever sincere about anything, even to herself—whether the whole of her daily existence, from her getting-up to her down-lying, was not a grandiose pretence.

Not that he had the least desire to cling to the Bible class, even as an alternative to the shop! No! He was much relieved to be rid of the Bible class. What upset him was the crude illogicality of the new decree, and the shameless tacit admission of previous insincerity.

Two hours later, as he stood idly at the window of his bedroom, watching the gas lamps of Trafalgar Road wax brighter in the last glooms of twilight, he was still occupied with the sham and the unreason and the lack of scruple suddenly revealed in the life of the elder generation. Unconsciously imitating a trick of his father's when annoyed but calm, he nodded his head several times, and with his tongue against his teeth made the noise which in writing is represented by 'tut-tut.' Yet somehow he had always known that it would

be so. At bottom, he was only pretending to himself to be shocked and outraged.

His plans were no further advanced ; indeed, they were put back, for this Saturday afternoon vigil in the shop would be in some sort a symbolic temporary defeat for him. Why had he not spoken out clearly ? Why was he always like a baby in presence of his father ? The future was all askew for him. He had forgotten his tremendous serious resolves. The touch of the half-sovereign in his pocket, however, was comforting in a universe of discomfort.

CHAPTER VIII IN THE SHOP

I

“**H**ERE, lad ! ” said his father to Edwin, as soon as he had scraped up the last crumbs of cheese from his plate at the end of dinner on the following day.

Edwin rose obediently and followed him out of the room. Having waited at the top of the stairs until his father had reached the foot, he leaned forward as far as he could with one hand on the rail and the other pressing against the wall, swooped down to the mat at the bottom, without touching a single step on the way, and made a rocket-like noise with his mouth. He had no other manner of descending the staircase, unless he happened to be in disgrace. His father went straight to the desk in the corner behind the account-book window, assumed his spectacles, and lifted the lid of the desk.

“ Here ! ” he said, in a low voice. “ Mr. Enoch Peake is stepping in this afternoon to look at this here.” He displayed the proof, an unusually elaborate wedding-card, which announced the marriage of Mr. Enoch Peake with Mrs. Louisa Loggerheads. “ Ye know him as I mean ? ”

“ Yes,” said Edwin. “ The stout man. The Cocknage Gardens man.”

“ That’s him. Well, ye’ll tell him I’ve been called away. Tell him who ye are. Not but what he’ll know. Tell him I think it might be better ”—Darius’s thick finger ran along a line of print—“ if we put ‘ widow of the late Simon Loggerheads, Esquire,’ instead of ‘ Esq.’ See ? Otherwise it’s all right. Tell him I say as otherwise it’s all right. And ask him if he’ll have it printed in silver, and how many he wants, and show him this sample envelope. Now, d’ye understand ? ”

"Yes," said Edwin, in a tone to convey, not disrespectfully, that there was nothing to understand. Curious, how his father had the air of bracing all his intellect as if to a problem!

"Then ye'll take it to Big James, and he can start Chawner on it. Th' job's promised for Monday forenoon."

"Will Big James be working?" asked Edwin, for it was Saturday afternoon, when, though the shop remained open, the printing office was closed.

"They're all on overtime," said Mr. Clayhanger; and then he added, in a voice still lower, and with a surreptitious glance at Miss Ingamells, the shop-woman, who was stolidly enfolding newspapers in wrappers at the opposite counter, "See to it yourself, now. He won't want to talk to *her* about a thing like that. Tell him I told you specially. Just let me see how well ye can do it."

"Right!" said Edwin; and to himself, superciliously: "It might be life and death."

"We ought to be doing a lot o' business wi' Enoch Peake, later on," Mr. Clayhanger finished, in a whisper.

"I see," said Edwin, impressed, perceiving that he had perhaps been supercilious too soon.

Mr. Clayhanger returned his spectacles to their case, and taking his hat from its customary hook behind him, over the job-files, consulted his watch and passed round the counter to go. Then he stopped.

"I'm going to Manchester," he murmured confidentially. "To see if I can pick up a machine as I've heard of."

Edwin was flattered. At the dinner-table Mr. Clayhanger had only vouchsafed that he had a train to catch, and would probably not be in till late at night.

The next moment he glimpsed Darius through the window, his arms motionless by his sides and sticking slightly out; hurrying in the sunshine along Wedgwood Street in the direction of Shawport station.

II

So this was business! It was not the business he desired and meant to have; and he was uneasy at the extent to which he was already entangled in it; but it was rather amusing,

and his father had really been very friendly. He felt a sense of importance.

Soon afterwards Clara ran into the shop to speak to Miss Ingamells. The two chatted and giggled together.

"Father's gone to Manchester," he found opportunity to say to Clara as she was leaving.

"Why aren't you doing those prizes he told you to do?" retorted Clara, and vanished. She wanted none of Edwin's superior airs.

During dinner Mr. Clayhanger had instructed his son to go through the Sunday school prize stock and make an inventory of it.

This injunction from the child Clara, which Miss Ingamells had certainly overheard, prevented him, as an independent man, from beginning his work for at least ten minutes. He whistled, opened his father's desk and stared vacantly into it, examined the pen-nib case in detail, and tore off two leaves from the date calendar so that it should be ready for Monday. He had a great scorn for Miss Ingamells, who was a personable if somewhat heavy creature of twenty-eight, because she kept company with a young man. He had caught them arm-in-arm and practically hugging each other, one Sunday afternoon in the street. He could see naught but silliness in that kind of thing.

The entrance of a customer caused him to turn abruptly to the high shelves where the books were kept. He was glad that the customer was not Mr. Enoch Peake, the expectation of whose arrival made him curiously nervous. He placed the step-ladder against the shelves, climbed up, and began to finger volumes and parcels of volumes. The dust was incredible. The disorder filled him with contempt. It was astounding that his father could tolerate such disorder; no doubt the whole shop was in the same condition. "Thirteen 'Archie's Old Desk,'" he read on a parcel, but when he opened the parcel he found seven "From Jest to Earnest." Hence he had to undo every parcel. However, the work was easy. He first wrote the inventory in pencil, then he copied it in ink; then he folded it, and wrote very carefully on the back, because his father had a mania for endorsing documents in the legal manner: "Inventory of Sunday school prize stock." And

after an instant's hesitation he added his own initials. Then he began to tie up and restore the parcels and the single volumes. None of all this literature had any charm for him. He possessed five or six such books, all gilt and chromatic, which had been awarded to him at Sunday school, 'suitably inscribed,' for doing nothing in particular; and he regarded them without exception as frauds upon boyhood. However, Clara had always enjoyed reading them. But lying flat on one of the top shelves he discovered, nearly at the end of his task, an oblong tome which did interest him: "Cazenove's Architectural Views of European Capitals, with descriptive letterpress." It had an old-fashioned look, and was probably some relic of his father's predecessor in the establishment. Another example of the lack of order which prevailed!

III

He took the volume to the retreat of the desk, and there turned over its pages of coloured illustrations. At first his interest in them, and in the letterpress, was less instinctive than deliberate. He said to himself: "Now, if there is anything in me, I ought really to be interested in this, and I must be interested in it." And he was. He glanced carelessly at the clock, which was hung above the shelves of exercise-books and notebooks, exactly opposite the door. A quarter-past four. The afternoon was quietly passing, and he had not found it too tedious. In the background of the task which (he considered) he had accomplished with extraordinary efficiency, his senses noted faintly the continual trickle of customers, all of whom were infallibly drawn to Miss Ingamells's counter by her mere watchful and receptive appearance. He had heard phrases and ends of phrases, such as: "No, we haven't anything smaller," "A camel-hair brush," "Gum but not glue," "Very sorry, sir, I'll speak firmly to the paper boy," and the sound of coins dragged along the counter, the sound of the testing of half a sovereign, the opening and shutting of the till-drawer; and occasionally Miss Ingamells exclaiming to herself upon the stupidity of customers after a customer had gone; and once Miss Ingamells crossing angrily to fix the door ajar which some heedless customer had closed: "Did they suppose that people didn't want

air like other people ? ” And now it was a quarter-past four. Undoubtedly he had a peculiar, and pleasant, feeling of importance. In another half-minute he glanced at the clock again, and it was a quarter to five.

What hypnotism attracted him towards the artists' materials cabinet which stood magnificent, complicated, and complete in the middle of the shop, like a monument ? His father, after one infantile disastrous raid, had absolutely forbidden any visitation of that cabinet, with its glass case of assorted paints, crayons, brushes and pencils, and its innumerable long drawers full of paper and cards and wondrous perfectly equipped boxes, and T-squares and set-squares, with a hundred other contrivances. But of course the order had now ceased to have force. Edwin had left school ; and, if he was not a man, he was certainly not a boy. He began to open the drawers, at first gingerly, then boldly ; after all it was no business of Miss Ingamells's ! And, to be just, Miss Ingamells made no sort of pretence that it was any business of hers. She proceeded with her own business. Edwin opened a rather large wooden water-colour box. It was marked five and sixpence. It seemed to comprise everything needed for the production of the most entrancing and majestic architectural views, and as Edwin took out its upper case and discovered still further marvellous devices and apparatus in its basement beneath, he dimly but passionately saw, in his heart, bright masterpieces that ought to be the fruit of that box. There was a key to it. He must have it. He would have given all that he possessed for it, if necessary.

IV

“ Miss Ingamells,” he said : and, as she did not look up immediately, “ I say, Miss Ingamells ! How much does father take off in the shilling to auntie when she buys anything ? ”

“ Don't ask *me*, Master Edwin,” said Miss Ingamells ; “ I don't know. How should I know ? ”

“ Well, then,” he muttered, “ I shall pay full price for it—that's all.” He could not wait, and he wanted to be on the safe side.

Miss Ingamells gave him change for his half-sovereign in a

strictly impartial manner, to indicate that she accepted no responsibility. And the squaring of Edwin's shoulders conveyed to Miss Ingamells that he advised her to keep carefully within her own sphere, and not to make impertinent inquiries about the origin of the half-sovereign, which he could see intrigued her acutely. He now owned the box ; it was not a box of colours, but a box of enchantment. He had had colour-boxes before, but nothing to compare with this, nothing that could have seemed magical to anybody wiser than a very small boy. Then he bought some cartridge-paper ; he considered that cartridge-paper would be good enough for preliminary experiments.

V

It was while he was paying for the cartridge-paper—he being, as was indeed proper, on the customers' side of the counter—that a heavy loutish boy in an apron entered the shop, blushing. Edwin turned away. This was Miss Ingamells's affair.

"If ye please, Mester Peake's sent me. He canna come in this afternoon—he's got a bit o' ratting on—and will Mester Clayhanger step across to th' Dragon to-night after eight, with that there peeper [paper] as he knows on?"

At the name of Peake, Edwin started. He had utterly forgotten the matter.

"Master Edwin," said Miss Ingamells dryly. "You know all about that, don't you?" Clearly she resented that he knew all about that while she didn't.

"Oh! Yes," Edwin stammered. "What did you say?"

It was his first piece of real business.

"If you please, Mester Peake sent me . . ." The messenger blundered through his message again word for word.

"Very well. I'll attend to it," said Edwin, as nonchalantly as he could.

Nevertheless he was at a loss what to do, simple though the situation might have seemed to a person with an experience of business longer than Edwin's. Just as three hours previously his father had appeared to be bracing all his intellect to a problem that struck Edwin as entirely simple, so now Edwin seemed to be bracing all his intellect to another aspect of the

same problem. Time, revenging his father! . . . What! Go across to the Dragon and in cold blood demand Mr. Enoch Peake, and then parley with Mr. Enoch Peake as one man with another! He had never been inside the Dragon. He had been brought up in the belief that the Dragon was a place of sin. The Dragon was included in the generic term 'gin-palace,' and quite probably in the Siamese-twin term 'gaming-saloon.' Moreover, to discuss business with Mr. Enoch Peake. . . . Mr. Enoch Peake was as mysterious to Edwin as, say, a Chinese mandarin! Still, business was business, and something would have to be done. He did not know what. Ought he to go to the Dragon? His father had not foreseen the possibility of this development. He instantly decided one fundamental: he would not consult Miss Ingamells; no, nor even Maggie! There remained only Big James. He went across to see Big James, who was calmly smoking a pipe on the little landing at the top of the steps leading to the printing office.

Big James showed no astonishment.

"You come along o' me to the Dragon to-night, young sir, at eight o'clock, or as soon after as makes no matter, and I'll see as you see Mr. Enoch Peake. I shall be coming up Woodisun Bank at eight o'clock, or as soon after as makes no matter. You be waiting for me at the back gates there, and I'll see as you see Mr. Enoch Peake."

"Are you going to the Dragon?"

"Am I going to the Dragon, young sir!" exclaimed Big James, in his majestic voice.

CHAPTER IX

THE TOWN

I

JAMES YARLETT was worthy of his nickname. He stood six feet four and a half inches in height, and his girth was proportionate; he had enormous hands and feet, large features, and a magnificent long dark brown beard; owing to this beard his necktie was never seen. But the most magnificent thing about him was his bass voice, acknowledged to be the finest bass in the town, and one of the finest even in Hanbridge, where, in his earlier prime, James had lived as a 'news comp' on the "Staffordshire Signal." He was now a 'jobbing comp' in Bursley, because Bursley was his native town and because he preferred jobbing. He made the fourth and heaviest member of the celebrated Bursley Male Glee Party, the other three being Arthur Smallrice, an old man with a striking falsetto voice, Abraham Harracles, and Jos Rawnpike (pronounced Rampick). These men were accustomed to fame, and Big James was the king of them, though the mildest. They sang at dinners, free-and-easies, concerts, and Martinmas tea-meetings. They sang for the glory, and when there was no demand for their services, they sang to themselves for the sake of singing. Each of them was a star in some church or chapel choir. And except Arthur Smallrice, they all shared a certain elasticity of religious opinion. Big James, for example, had varied in ten years from Wesleyan, through Old Church, to Roman Catholic up at Bleakridge. It all depended on niceties in the treatment accorded to him, and on the choice of anthems. Moreover, he liked a change.

He was what his superiors called 'a very superior man.' Owing to the more careful enunciation required in singing, he had lost a great deal of the Five Towns accent, and one

cannot be a compositor for a quarter of a century without insensibly acquiring an education and a store of knowledge far excelling the ordinary. His manner was gentle, and perhaps somewhat pompous, as is common with very big men ; but you could never be sure whether an extremely subdued humour did not underlie his pomposity. He was a bachelor, aged forty-five, and lived quietly with a married sister at the bottom of Woodisun Bank, near the National Schools. The wonder was that, with all his advantages, he had not more deeply impressed himself upon Bursley as an individuality, and not merely as a voice. But he seemed never to seek to do so. He was without ambition ; and, though curiously careful sometimes about preserving his own dignity, and beyond question sensitive by temperament, he showed marked respect, and even humility, to the worldly-successful. Despite his bigness and simplicity there was something small about him which came out in odd trifling details. Thus it was characteristic of Big James to ask Edwin to be waiting for him at the back gates in Woodisun Bank when he might just as easily have met him at the side door by the closed shop in Wedgwood Street.

Edwin, who from mere pride had said nothing to his sisters about the impending visit to the Dragon, was a little surprised and dashed to see Big James in broadcloth and a high hat ; for he had not dreamed of changing his own everyday suit, nor had it occurred to him that the Dragon was a temple of ceremoniousness. Big James looked enormous. The wide lapel of his shining frock-coat was buttoned high up under his beard and curved downwards for a distance of considerably more than a yard to his knees : it was a heroic frock-coat. The sleeves were wide, but narrowing at the wrists, and the white wristbands were very tight. The trousers fell in ample folds on the uppers of the gigantic boots. Big James had a way of sticking out his chest and throwing his head back which would have projected the tip of his beard ten inches forth from his body had the beard been stiff ; but the soft silkiness of the beard frustrated this spectacular phenomenon, which would have been very interesting to witness.

II

The pair stepped across Trafalgar Road together, Edwin, though he tried to be sedate, nothing but a frisking morsel by the side of the vast monument. Compared with the architectural grandeur of Mr. Yarlett, his thin, supple, free-moving limbs had an almost pathetic appearance of ephemeral fragility.

Big James directed himself to the archway leading to the Dragon stables, and there he saw an ostler or oddman. Edwin, feeling the imminence of an ordeal, surreptitiously explored a pocket to be sure that the proof of the wedding-card was safely there.

The ostler raised his reddish eyebrows to Big James. Big James jerked his head to one side, indicating apparently the entire Dragon, and simultaneously conveying a query. The ostler paused immobile an instant and then shook his insignificant turnip-pate. Big James turned away. No word had been spoken; nevertheless, the men had exchanged a dialogue which might be thus put into words—

“I wasn’t thinking to see ye so soon,” from the ostler.

“Then nobody of any importance has yet gone into the assembly room?” from Big James.

“Nobody worth speaking of, and won’t, for a while,” from the other.

“Then I’ll take a turn,” from Big James.

The latter now looked down at Edwin, and addressed him in words—

“Seemingly we’re too soon, Mr. Edwin. What do you say to a turn round the town—playground way? I doubted we should be too soon.”

Edwin showed alacrity. As a schoolboy it had been definitely forbidden to him to go out at night; and unless sent on a special and hurried errand, he had scarcely seen the physiognomy of the streets after eight o’clock. He had never seen the playground in the evening. And this evening the town did not seem like the same town; it had become a new and mysterious town of adventure. And yet Edwin was not fifty yards away from his own bedroom.

They ascended Duck Bank together, Edwin proud to be

with a celebrity of the calibre of Big James, and Big James calmly satisfied to show himself thus formally with his master's son. It appeared almost incredible that those two immortals, so diverse, had issued from the womb practically alike ; that a few brief years on the earth had given Big James such a tremendous physical advantage. Several hours' daily submission to the exact regularities of lines of type and to the unvarying demands of minutely adjusted machines in motion had stamped Big James's body and mind with the delicate and quasi-finicking preciseness which characterizes all compositors and printers ; and the continual monotonous performance of similar tasks that employed his faculties while never absorbing or straining them, had soothed and dulled the fever of life in him to a beneficent calm, a calm refined and beautified by the pleasurable exercise of song. Big James had seldom known a violent emotion. He had craved nothing, sought for nothing, and lost nothing.

Edwin, like Big James in progress from everlasting to everlasting, was all inchoate, unformed, undisciplined, and burning with capricious fires ; all expectant, eager, reluctant, tingling, timid, innocently and wistfully audacious. By taking the boy's hand, Big James might have poetically symbolized their relation.

III

"Are you going to sing to-night at the Dragon, Mr. Yarett ?" asked Edwin. He lengthened his step to Big James's, controlled his ardent body, and tried to remember that he was a man with a man.

"I am, young sir," said Big James. "There is a party of us."

"Is it the Male Glee Party ?" Edwin pursued.

"Yes, Mr. Edwin."

"Then Mr. Smallrice will be there ?"

"He will, Mr. Edwin."

"Why can Mr. Smallrice sing such high notes ?"

Big James slowly shook his head, as Edwin looked up at him. "I tell you what it is, young sir. It's a gift, that's what it is, same as I can sing low."

"But Mr. Smallrice is very old, isn't he ?"

"There's a parrot in a cage over at the Duck, there, as is eighty-five years old, and that's proved by record kept, young sir."

"No!" protested Edwin's incredulity politely.

"By record kept," said Big James.

"Do you often sing at the Dragon, Mr. Yarlett?"

"Time was," said Big James, "when some of us used to sing there every night, Sundays excepted, and concerts and what not excepted. Aye! For hours and hours every night. And still do sometimes."

"After your work?"

"After our work. Aye! And often till dawn in summer. One o'clock, two o'clock, half-past two o'clock, every night. But now they say that this new Licensing Act will close every public-house in this town at eleven o'clock, and a straight-up eleven at that! . . ."

"But what do you do it for?"

"What do we do it for? We do it to pass the time and the glass, young sir. Not as I should like you to think as I ever drank, Mr. Edwin. One quart of ale I take every night, and have ever done; no more, no less."

"But"—Edwin's rapid, breaking voice interrupted eagerly the deep majestic tones—"aren't you tired the next day? I should be!"

"Never," said Big James. "I get up from my bed as fresh as a daisy at six sharp. And I've known the nights when my bed ne'er saw me."

"You must be strong, Mr. Yarlett, my word!" Edwin exclaimed. These revelations of the habits and prowess of Big James astounded him. He had never suspected that such things went on in the town.

"Aye! Middling!"

"I suppose it's a free-and-easy at the Dragon, to-night, Mr. Yarlett?"

"In a manner of speaking," said Big James.

"I wish I could stay for it."

"And why not?" Big James suggested, and looked down at Edwin with half-humorous incertitude.

Edwin shrugged his shoulders superiorly, indicating by instinct, in spite of himself, that possibly Big James was

trespassing over the social line that divided them. And yet Big James's father would have condescended to Edwin's grandfather. Only, Edwin now belonged to the employing class, whilst Big James belonged to the employed. Already Edwin, whose father had been thrashed by workmen whom a compositor would hesitate to call skilled—already Edwin had the mien natural to a ruler, and Big James, with dignified deference, would submit unresentingly to his attitude. It was the subtlest thing. It was not that Edwin obscurely objected to the suggestion of his being present at the free-and-easy; it was that he objected (but nicely, and with good nature) to any assumption of Big James's right to influence him towards an act that his father would not approve. Instead of saying, "Why not?" Big James ought to have said: "Nobody but you can decide that, as your father's away." James ought to have been strictly impartial.

IV

"Well," said Big James, when they arrived at the playground, which lay north of the covered Meat Market or Shambles, "it looks as if they hadn't been able to make a start yet at the Blood Tub." His tone was marked by a calm, grand disdain, as of one entertainer talking about another.

The Blood Tub, otherwise known as Snaggs's, was the centre of nocturnal pleasure in Bursley. It stood almost on the very spot where the jawbone of a whale had once lain, as a supreme natural curiosity. It represented the softened manners which had developed out of the old mediaevalism of the century. It had supplanted the bear-pit and the cock-pit. It corresponded somewhat with the ideals symbolized by the new Town Hall. In the tiny odorous beer-houses of all the undulating, twisting, reddish streets that surrounded the contiguous open spaces of Duck Bank, the playground, the market-place, and St. Luke's Square, the folk no longer discussed eagerly what chance on Sunday morning the municipal bear would have against five dogs. They had progressed as far as a free library, boxing-gloves, rabbit-coursing, and the Blood Tub.

This last was a theatre with wooden sides and a canvas roof, and it would hold quite a crowd of people. In front of it was a platform, and an orchestra, lighted by oil flares that,

as Big James and Edwin approached, were gaining strength in the twilight. Leaning against the platform was a black-board on which was chalked the announcement of two plays : " The Forty Thieves " (author unstated) and Cruikshank's " The Bottle." The orchestra, after terrific concussions, fell silent, and then a troupe of players in costume, cramped on the narrow trestle boards, performed a sample scene from " The Forty Thieves," just to give the crowd in front an idea of the wonders of this powerful work. And four thieves passed and repassed behind the screen hiding the doors, and reappeared nine times as four fresh thieves until the tale of forty was complete. And then old Hammerad, the beloved clown who played the drum (and whose wife kept a barber's shop in Buck Row and shaved for a penny), left his drum and did two minutes' stiff clowning, and then the orchestra burst forth again, and the brazen voice of old Snaggs (in his moleskin waistcoat) easily rode the storm, adjuring the folk to walk up and walk up : which some of the folk did do. And lastly the band played " God Save the Queen," and the players, followed by old Snaggs, processionally entered the booth.

" I lay they come out again," said Big James, with grim blandness.

" Why ? " asked Edwin. He was absolutely new to the scene.

" I lay they haven't got twenty couple inside," said Big James.

And in less than a minute the troupe did indeed emerge, and old Snaggs expostulated with a dilatory public, respectfully but firmly. It had been a queer year for Mr. Snaggs. Rain had ruined the Wakes ; rain had ruined everything ; rain had nearly ruined him. July was obviously not a month in which a self-respecting theatre ought to be open, but Mr. Snaggs had got to the point of catching at straws. He stated that in order to prove his absolute *bona fides* the troupe would now give a scene from that world-renowned and unique drama, " The Bottle," after which the performance really would commence, since he could not as a gentleman keep his kind patrons within waiting any longer. His habit, which emphasized itself as he grew older, was to treat the staring crowd in front of his booth like a family of nephews and nieces. The device was quite useless, for the public's stolidity was impreg-

nable. It touched the heroic. No more granitic and crass stolidity could have been discovered in England. The crowd stood ; it exercised no other function of existence. It just stood, and there it would stand until convinced that the gratis part of the spectacle was positively at an end.

V

With a ceremonious gesture signifying that he assumed the young sir's consent, Big James turned away. He had displayed to Edwin the poverty and the futility of the Blood Tub. Edwin would perhaps have liked to stay. The scenes enacted on the outer platform were certainly tinged with the ridiculous, but they were the first histrionics that he had ever witnessed ; and he could not help thinking, hoping, in spite of his common sense, that within the booth all was different, miraculously transformed into the grand and the impressive. Left to himself, he would surely have preferred an evening at the Blood Tub to a business interview with Mr. Enoch Peake at the Dragon. But naturally he had to scorn the Blood Tub with a scorn equal to the massive and silent scorn of Big James. And on the whole he considered that he was behaving as a man with another man rather well. He sought by depreciatory remarks to keep the conversation at its proper adult level.

Big James led him through the market-place, where a few vegetable, tripe, and gingerbread stalls—relics of the day's market—were still attracting customers in the twilight. These slatternly and picturesque groups, beneath their flickering yellow flares, were encamped at the gigantic foot of the Town Hall porch as at the foot of a precipice. The monstrous black walls of the Town Hall rose and were merged in gloom ; and the spire of the Town Hall, on whose summit stood a gold angel holding a gold crown, rose right into the heavens and was there lost. It was marvellous that this town, by adding stone to stone, had upreared this monument which, in expressing the secret nobility of its ideals, dwarfed the town. On every side of it the beer-houses, full of a dulled, savage ecstasy of life, gleamed brighter than the shops. Big James led Edwin down through the mysteries of the Cock Yard and up along Bugg's Gutter, and so back to the Dragon.

CHAPTER X

FREE AND EASY

I

WHEN Edwin, shyly, followed Big James into the assembly room of the Dragon, it already held a fair sprinkling of men, and new-comers continued to drop in. They were soberly and respectably clothed, though a few had knotted handkerchiefs round their necks instead of collars and ties. The occasion was a jollity of the Bursley Mutual Burial Club. This Club, a singular example of that dogged private co-operative enterprise which so sharply distinguishes English corporate life from the corporate life of other European countries, had lustily survived from a period when men were far less sure of a decent burial than they were then, in the very prosperous early 'seventies. It had helped to maintain the barbaric fashion of ostentatiously expensive funerals, out of which undertakers and beer-sellers made vast sums ; but it had also provided a basis of common endeavour and of fellowship. And its respectability was intense, and at the same time broad-minded. To be an established subscriber to the Burial Club was evidence of good character and of social spirit. The periodic jollities of this company of men whose professed aim was to bury each other, had a high reputation for excellence. Up till a year previously they had always been held at the Duck, in Duck Square, opposite ; but Mr. Enoch Peake, Chairman of the Club, had by persistent and relentless chicane, triumphing over immense influences, changed their venue to the Dragon, whose landlady, Mrs. Louisa Loggerheads, he was then courting. (It must be stated that Mrs. Louisa's name contained no slur of cantankerousness ; it is merely the local word for a harmless plant, the knapweed.) He had now won Mrs. Loggerheads, after being a widower thrice, and with her the second best 'house' in the town.

There were long benches down the room, with forms on either side of them. Big James, not without pomp, escorted a blushing Edwin to the end of one of these tables, near a small raised platform that occupied the extremity of the room. Over this platform was printed a legend : " As a bird is known by its note——" ; and over the legend was a full-rigged ship in a glass case, and a pair of antlers. The walls of the room were dark brown, the ceiling grey with soot of various sorts, and the floor tiled red-and-black and sanded. Smoke rose in spirals from about a score of churchwarden pipes and as many cutties, which were charged from tin pouches, and lighted by spills of newspaper from the three double gas-jets that hung down over the benches. Two middle-aged women, one in black and the other checked, served beer, porter, and stout in mugs, and gin in glasses, passing in and out through a side door. The company talked little, and it had not yet begun seriously to drink ; but, sprawled about in attitudes of restful abeyance, it was smoking religiously, and the flat noise of solemn expectorations punctuated the minutes. Edwin was easily the youngest person present—the average age appeared to be about fifty—but nobody's curiosity seemed to be much stirred by his odd arrival, and he ceased gradually to blush. When, however, one of the women paused before him in silent question, and he had to explain that he required no drink because he had only called for a moment about a matter of business, he blushed again vigorously.

II

Then Mr. Enoch Peake appeared. He was a short, stout old man, with fat hands, a red, minutely wrinkled face, and very small eyes. Greeted with the respect due to the owner of Cocknage Gardens, a sporting resort where all the best foot-racing and rabbit-coursing took place, he accepted it in somnolent indifference, and immediately took off his coat and sat down in cotton shirt-sleeves. Then he pulled out a red handkerchief and his tobacco-box, and set them on the table. Big James motioned to Edwin.

" Evening, Mr. Peake," said Big James, crossing the floor, " and here's a young gent wishful for two words with you."

Mr. Peake stared vacantly.

"Young Mr. Clayhanger," explained Big James.

"It's about this card," Edwin began, in a whisper, drawing the wedding card sheepishly from his pocket. "Father had to go to Manchester," he added, when he had finished.

Mr. Enoch Peake seized the card in both hands, and examined it; and Edwin could hear his heavy breathing.

Mrs. Louisa Loggerheads, a comfortable, smiling, administrative woman of fifty, showed herself at the service-door, and nodded with dignity to a few of the habitués.

"Missis is at door," said Big James to Mr. Peake.

"Is her?" muttered Mr. Peake, not interrupting his examination of the card.

One of the serving women, having removed Mr. Peake's coat, brought a new churchwarden, filled it, and carefully directed the tip towards his tight little mouth: the lips closed on it. Then she lighted a spill and applied it to the distant bowl, and the mouth puffed; and then the woman deposited the bowl cautiously on the bench. Lastly, she came with a small glass of sloe gin. Mr. Peake did not move.

At length Mr. Peake withdrew the pipe from his mouth, and after an interval said—

"Aye!"

He continued to stare at the card, now held in one hand.

"And is it to be printed in silver?" Edwin asked.

Mr. Peake took a few more puffs.

"Aye!"

When he had stared further for a long time at the card, his hand moved slowly with it towards Edwin, and Edwin resumed possession of it.

Mrs. Louisa Loggerheads had now vanished.

"Missis has gone," said Big James.

"Has her?" muttered Mr. Peake.

Edwin rose to leave, though unwillingly; but Big James asked him in polite reproach whether he should not stay for the first song. He nodded, encouraged; and sat down. He did not know that the uppermost idea in Big James's mind for an hour past had been that Edwin would hear him sing.

Mr. Peake lifted his glass, held it from him, approached his lips towards it, and emptied it at a draught. He then glanced round and said thickly—

"Gentlemen all, Mester Smallrice, Mester Harracles, Mester Rampick, and Mester Yarlett will now oblige with one o' th' ould favourites."

There was some applause, a few coats were removed, and Mr. Peake fixed himself in a contemplative attitude.

III

Messrs. Arthur Smallrice, Abraham Harracles, Jos Rawn-pike, and James Yarlett rose, stepped heavily on to the little platform, and stood in a line with their hands in their pockets. "As a bird is known by its note——" was hidden by the rampart of their shoulders. They had no music. They knew the music; they had sung it a thousand times. They knew precisely the effects which they wished to produce, and the means of production. They worked together like an inspired machine. Mr. Arthur Smallrice gave a rapid glance into a corner, and from that corner a concertina spoke—one short note. Then began, with no hesitating, shuffling preliminaries nor mute consultations, the singing of that classic quartet, justly celebrated from Hull to Wigan and from Northallerton to Lichfield, "Loud Ocean's Roar." The thing was performed with absolute assurance and perfection. Mr. Arthur Smallrice did the yapping of the short waves on the foam-veiled rocks, and Big James in fullest grandeur did the long and mighty rolling of the deep. It was majestic, terrific, and overwhelming. Many bars before the close Edwin was thrilled, as by an exquisite and vast revelation. He tingled from head to foot. He had never heard any singing like it, or any singing in any way comparable to it. He had never guessed that song held such possibilities of emotion. The pure and fine essential qualities of the voices, the dizzying harmonies, the fugal calls and responses, the strange relief of the unisons, and above all the free, natural mien of the singers, proudly aware that they were producing something beautiful that could not be produced more beautifully, conscious of unchallenged supremacy—all this enfevered him to an unprecedented and self-astonished enthusiasm.

He murmured under his breath, as "Loud Ocean's Roar" died away and the little voices of the street supervened: "By Gad! By Gad!"

The applause was generous. Edwin stamped and clapped with childlike violence and fury. Mr. Peake slowly and regularly thumped one fist on the bench, puffing the while. Glasses and mugs could be seen, but not heard, dancing. Mr. Arthur Smallrice, Mr. Abraham Harracles, Mr. Jos Rawnpike, and Mr. James Yarlett, entirely inattentive to the acclamations, stepped heavily from the platform and sat down. When Edwin caught Big James's eye he clapped again, reanimating the general approval, and Big James gazed at him with bland satisfaction. Mr. Enoch Peake was now, save for the rise and fall of his great chest, as immobile and brooding as an Indian god.

IV

Edwin did not depart. He reflected that, even if his father should come home earlier than the last train and prove curious, it would be impossible for him to know the exact moment at which his son had been able to have speech with Mr. Enoch Peake on the important matter of business. For aught his father could ever guess he might have been prevented from obtaining the attention of the chairman of the proceedings until, say, eleven o'clock. Also, he meant to present his conduct to his father in the light of an enterprising and fearless action showing a marked aptitude for affairs. Mr. Enoch Peake, whom his father was anxious to flatter, had desired his father's company at the Dragon, and, to save the situation, Edwin had courageously gone instead: that was it.

Besides, he would have stayed in any case. His mind was elevated above the fear of consequences.

There was some concertina-playing, with a realistic imitation of church bells borne on the wind from a distance; and then the Bursley Prize Handbell Ringers (or Campanologists) produced a whole family of real bells from under a form, and the ostler and the two women arranged a special table, and the campanologists fixed their bells on it and themselves round it, and performed a selection of Scotch and Irish airs, without once deceiving themselves as to the precise note which a chosen bell would emit when dully shaken.

Singular as was this feat, it was far less so than a young man's performance of the ophicleide, a serpentine instrument

that coiled round and about its player, and when breathed into persuasively gave forth prodigious brassy sounds that resembled the night-noises of beasts of prey. This item roused the Indian god from his umbilical contemplations, and as the young ophicleide player, somewhat breathless, passed down the room with his brazen creature in his arms, Mr. Enoch Peake pulled him by the jacket-tail.

"Eh!" said Mr. Enoch Peake. "Is that the ophicleide as thy father used to play at th' owd church?"

"Yes, Mr. Peake," said the young man, with bright respect.

Mr. Peake dropped his eyes again, and when the young man had gone, he murmured, to his stomach—

"I well knowed it were th' ophicleide as his father used to play at th' owd church!" And suddenly starting up, he continued hoarsely, "Gentlemen all, Mr. James Yarlett will now kindly oblige with 'The Miller of the Dee.'" And one of the women relighted his pipe and served him with beer.

v

Big James's rendering of "The Miller of the Dee" had been renowned in the Five Towns since 1852. It was classical, hallowed. It was the only possible rendering of "The Miller of the Dee." If the greatest bass in the world had come incognito to Bursley and sung "The Miller of the Dee," people would have said, "Ah! But ye should hear Big James sing it!" It suited Big James. The sentiments of the song were his sentiments; he expressed them with natural simplicity; but at the same time they underwent a certain refinement at his hands; for even when he sang at his loudest Big James was refined, natty, and restrained. His instinctive gentlemanliness was invincible and all-pervading. And the real beauty and enormous power of his magnificent voice saved him by its mere distinction from the charge of being finicking. The simple sound of the voice gave pleasure. And the simple production of that sound was Big James's deepest joy. Amid all the expected loud applause the giant looked naively for Edwin's boyish mad enthusiasm, and felt it; and was thrilled, and very glad that he had brought Edwin. As for Edwin, Edwin was humbled that he should have been so blind to what Big James was. He had always

regarded Big James as a dull, decent, somewhat peculiar fellow in a dirty apron, who was his father's foreman. He had actually talked once to Big James of the wonderful way in which Maggie and Clara sang, and Big James had been properly respectful. But the singing of Maggie and Clara was less than nothing, the crudest amateurism, compared to these public performances of Big James's. Even the accompanying concertina was far more cleverly handled than the Clayhanger piano had ever been handled. Yes, Edwin was humbled. And he had a great wish to be able to do something brilliantly himself—he knew not what. The intoxication of the desire for glory was upon him as he sat amid those shirt-sleeved men, near the brooding Indian god, under a crawling bluish canopy of smoke, gazing absently at the legend: "As a bird is known by its note——"

After an interval, during which Mr. Enoch Peake was roused more than once, a man with a Lancashire accent recited a poem entitled "The Patent Hairbrushing Machine," the rotary hair-brush being at that time an exceedingly piquant novelty that had only been heard of in the barbers' shops of the Five Towns, though travellers to Manchester could boast that they had sat under it. As the principle of the new machine was easily grasped, and the sensation induced by it easily imagined, the recitation had a success which was indicated by slappings of thighs and great blowings-off of mirth. But Mr. Enoch Peake preserved his tranquillity throughout it, and immediately it was over he announced with haste—

"Gentlemen all, Miss Florence Simcox—or shall us say Mrs. Offlow, wife of the gentleman who has just obliged—the champion female clog-dancer of the Midlands, will now oblige."

VI

These words put every man whom they surprised into a state of unusual animation; and they surprised most of the company. It may be doubted whether a female clog-dancer had ever footed it in Bursley. Several public-houses possessed local champions—of a street, of a village—but these were emphatically not women. Enoch Peake had arranged this daring item in the course of his afternoon's business at Cock-

nage Gardens, Mr. Offlow being an expert in ratting terriers, and Mrs. Offlow happening to be on a tour with her husband through the realms of her championship, a tour which mingled the varying advantages derivable from terriers, recitations, and clogs. The affair was therefore respectable beyond cavil.

Nevertheless when Florence shone suddenly at the service-door, the shortness of her red-and-black velvet skirts, and the undeniable complete visibility of her rounded calves produced an uneasy and agreeable impression that Enoch Peake, for a chairman of the Mutual Burial Club, had gone rather far, superbly far, and that his moral ascendancy over Louisa Loggerheads must indeed be truly astonishing. Louisa now stood gravely behind the dancer, in the shadow of the doorway, and the contrast between her and Florence was in every way striking enough to prove what a wonderful and mysterious man Enoch Peake was. Florence was accustomed to audiences. She was a pretty, doll-like woman, if inclined to amplitude; but the smile between those shaking golden ringlets had neither the modesty nor the false modesty nor the docility that Bursley was accustomed to think proper to the face of woman. It could have stared down any man in the place, except perhaps Mr. Peake.

The gestures of Mr. Offlow, and her gestures, as he arranged and prepared the surface of the little square dancing-board that was her throne, showed that he was the husband of Florence Simcox rather than she the wife of Offlow the reciter and dog-fancier. Further, it was his rôle to play the concertina to her: he had had to learn the concertina—possibly a secret humiliation for one whose judgment in terriers was not excelled in many public-houses.

VII

She danced; and the service-doorway showed a vista of open-mouthed scullions. There was no sound in the room, save the concertina and the champion clogs. Every eye was fixed on those clogs; even the little eyes of Mr. Peake quitted the button of his waistcoat and burned like diamond points on those clogs. Florence herself chiefly gazed on those clogs, but occasionally her nonchalant petulant gaze would wander up and down her bare arms and across her bosom. At intervals,

with her ringed fingers she would lift the short skirt—a nothing, an imperceptibility, half an inch, with glance down-cast; and the effect was profound, recondite, inexplicable. Her style was not that of a male clog-dancer, but it was indubitably clog-dancing, full of marvels to the connoisseur, and to the profane naught but a highly complicated series of wooden noises. Florence's face began to perspire. Then the concertina ceased playing—so that an undistracted attention might be given to the supremely difficult final figures of the dance.

And thus was rendered back to the people in the charming form of beauty that which the instinct of the artist had taken from the sordid ugliness of the people. The clog, the very emblem of the servitude and the squalor of brutalized populations, was changed, on the light feet of this favourite, into the medium of grace. Few of these men but at some time of their lives had worn the clog, had clattered in it through winter's slush, and through the freezing darkness before dawn, to the manufactory and the mill and the mine, whence after a day of labour under discipline more than military, they had clattered back to their little candle-lighted homes. One of the slatterns behind the doorway actually stood in clogs to watch the dancer. The clog meant everything that was harsh, foul, and desolating; it summoned images of misery and disgust. Yet on those feet that had never worn it seriously, it became the magic instrument of pleasure, waking dulled wits and forgotten aspirations, putting upon everybody an enchantment. . . . And then, suddenly, the dancer threw up one foot as high as her head and brought two clogs down together like a double mallet on the board, and stood still. It was over.

Mrs. Louisa Loggerheads turned nervously away, pushing her servants in front of her. And when the society of mutual buriers had recovered from the startling shameless insolence of that last high kick, it gave the rein to its panting excitement, and roared and stamped. Edwin was staggered. The blood swept into his face, a hot tide. He was ravished, but he was also staggered. He did not know what to think of Florence, the champion female clog-dancer. He felt that she was wondrous; he felt that he could have gazed at her all night;

but he felt that she had put him under the necessity of reconsidering some of his fundamental opinions. For example, he was obliged to admit within himself a lessening of scorn for the attitude toward each other of Miss Ingamells and her young man. He saw those things in a new light. And he reflected, dazzled by the unforeseen chances of existence: "Yesterday I was at school—and to-day I see this!" He was so pre-occupied by his own intimate sensations that the idea of applauding never occurred to him, until he perceived his conspicuousness in not applauding, whereupon he clapped self-consciously.

VIII

Miss Florence Simcox, somewhat breathless, tripped away, with simulated coyness and many curtsies. She had done her task, and as a woman she had to go: this was a gathering of members of the Mutual Burial Club, a masculine company, and not meet for females. The men pulled themselves together, remembering that their proudest quality was a stoic callousness that nothing could overthrow. They refilled pipes, ordered more beer, and resumed the mask of invulnerable solemnity.

"Aye!" muttered Mr. Enoch Peake.

Edwin, with a great effort, rose and walked out. He would have liked to say good night to Big James; he did not deny that he ought to have done so; but he dared not complicate his exit. On the pavement outside, in the warm damp night, a few loitering listeners stood doggedly before an open window, hearkening, their hands deep in their pockets, motionless. And Edwin could hear Mr. Enoch Peake: "Gentlemen all, Mester Arthur Smallrice, Mester Abraham Harracles, Mester Jos Rampick, and Mester James Yarlett——"

CHAPTER XI

SON AND FATHER

I

LATER that evening, Edwin sat at a small deal table in the embrasure of the dormer window of the empty attic next to his bedroom. During the interval between tea and the rendezvous with Big James he had formally planted his flag in that room. He had swept it out with a 'long-brush' while Clara stood at the door giggling at the spectacle and telling him that he had no right thus to annex territory in the absence of the overlord. He had mounted a pair of steps, and put a lot of lumber through a trap at the head of the stairs into the loft. And he had got a table, a lamp, and a chair. That was all that he needed for the moment. He had gone out to meet Big James with his head quite half-full of this vague attic-project, but the night sights of Bursley, and especially the music at the Dragon, and still more especially the dancing at the Dragon, had almost expelled the attic-project from his head. When he returned unobtrusively into the house and learnt from a disturbed Mrs. Nixon, who was sewing in the kitchen, that he was understood to be in his new attic, and that his sisters had gone to bed, the enchantment of the attic had instantly resumed much of its power over him, and he had hurried upstairs fortified with a slice of bread and half a cold sausage. He had eaten the food absently in gulps while staring at the cover of "Cazenove's Architectural Views of European Capitals," abstracted from the shop without payment. Then he had pinned part of a sheet of cartridge-paper on an old drawing-board which he possessed, and had sat down. For his purpose the paper ought to have been soaked and stretched on the board with paste, but that would have meant a delay of seven or eight hours, and he was not willing to wait. Though he

could not concentrate his mind to begin, his mind could not be reconciled to waiting. So he had decided to draw his picture in pencil outline, and then stretch the paper early on Sunday morning; it would dry during chapel. His new box of paints, a cracked T-square, and some india-rubber also lay on the table.

He had chosen "View of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, Paris, from the Pont des Arts." It pleased him by the coloration of the old houses in front of Notre-Dame, and the reflections in the water of the Seine, and the elusive blueness of the twin towers amid the pale grey clouds of a Parisian sky. A romantic scene! He wanted to copy it exactly, to recreate it from beginning to end, to feel the thrill of producing each wonderful effect himself. Yet he sat inactive. He sat and vaguely gazed at the slope of Trafalgar Road with its double row of yellow jewels, beautifully ascending in fire to the ridge of the horizon and there losing itself in the deep and solemn purple of the summer night; and he thought how ugly and commonplace all that was, and how different from all that were the noble capitals of Europe. Scarcely a sound came through the open windows; song doubtless still gushed forth at the Dragon, and revellers would not for hours awake the street on their way to the exacerbating atmosphere of home.

II

He had no resolution to take up the pencil. Yet after the Male Glee Party had sung "Loud Ocean's Roar," he remembered that he had had a most clear and distinct impulse to begin drawing architecture at once, and to do something grand and fine, as grand and fine as the singing, something that would thrill people as the singing thrilled. If he had not rushed home instantly it was solely because he had been held back by the stronger desire to hear more music and by the hope of further novel and exciting sensations. But Florence the clog-dancer had easily diverted the seeming-powerful current of his mind. He wanted as much as ever to do wondrous things, and to do them soon, but it appeared to him that he must think out first the enigmatic subject of Florence. Never had he seen any female creature as he saw

her, and ephemeral images of her were continually forming and dissolving before him. He could come to no conclusion at all about the subject of Florence. Only his boyish pride was gradually being beaten back by an on-coming idea that up to that very evening he had been a sort of rather silly kid with no eyes in his head.

It was in order to ignore for a time this unsettling and humiliating idea that, finally, he began to copy the outlines of the Parisian scene on his cartridge-paper. He was in no way a skilled draughtsman, but he had dabbled in pencils and colours, and he had lately picked up from a handbook the hint that in blocking out a drawing the first thing to do was to observe what points were vertically under what points, and what points horizontal with what points. He seemed to see the whole secret of draughtsmanship in this priceless counsel, which, indeed, with an elementary knowledge of geometry acquired at school, and the familiarity of his fingers with a pencil, constituted the whole of his technical equipment. All the rest was mere desire. Happily the architectural nature of the subject made it more amenable than, say, a rural landscape to the use of a T-square and common sense. And Edwin considered that he was doing rather well until, quitting measurements and rulings, he arrived at the stage of drawing the detail of the towers. Then at once the dream of perfect accomplishment began to fade at the edges, and the crust of faith to yield ominously. Each stroke was a falling-away from the ideal, a blow to hope.

And suddenly a yawn surprised him, and recalled him to the existence of his body. He thought: "I can't really be tired. It would be absurd to go to bed." For his theory had long been that the notions of parents about bedtime were indeed absurd, and that he would be just as thoroughly reposed after three hours' sleep as after ten. And now that he was a man he meant to practise his theory so far as circumstances allowed. He looked at his watch. It was turned half-past eleven. A delicious wave of joy and of satisfaction animated him. He had never been up so late, within his recollection, save on a few occasions when even infants were allowed to be up late. He was alone, secreted, master of his time and his activity, his mind charged with novel impressions, and a congenial work

in progress. Alone? . . . It was as if he was spiritually alone in the vast solitude of the night. It was as if he could behold the unconscious forms of all humanity, sleeping. This feeling that only he had preserved consciousness and energy, that he was the sole active possessor of the mysterious night, affected him in the most exquisite manner. He had not been so nobly happy in his life. And at the same time he was proud, in a childlike way, of being up so late.

III

He heard the door being pushed open, and he gave a jump and turned his head. His father stood in the entrance to the attic.

"Hello, father!" he said weakly, ingratiatingly.

"What art doing at this time o' night, lad?" Darius Clayhanger demanded.

Strange to say, the autocrat was not angered by the remarkable sight in front of him. Edwin knew that his father would probably come home from Manchester on the mail train, which would stop to set down a passenger at Shawport by suitable arrangement. And he had expected that his father would go to bed, as usual on such evenings, after having eaten the supper left for him in the sitting-room. His father's bedroom was next door to the sitting-room. Save for Mrs. Nixon in a distant nook, Edwin had the attic floor to himself. He ought to have been as safe from intrusion there as in the farthest capital of Europe. His father did not climb the attic stairs once in six months. So that he had regarded himself as secure. Still, he must have positively forgotten the very existence of his father; he must have been 'lost,' otherwise he could not but have heard the footsteps on the stairs.

"I was just drawing," said Edwin, with a little more confidence.

He looked at his father and saw an old man, a man who for him had always been old, generally harsh, often truculent, and seldom indulgent. He saw an ugly, undistinguished, and somewhat vulgar man (far less dignified, for instance, than Big James); a man who had his way by force and scarcely ever by argument; a man whose arguments for or against a given course were simply pitiable, if not despicable.

He sometimes indeed thought that there must be a peculiar twist in his father's brain which prevented him from appreciating an adverse point in a debate ; he had ceased to expect that his father would listen to reason. Latterly he was always surprised when, as to-night, he caught a glance of mild benevolence on that face ; yet he would never fail to respond to such a mood eagerly, without resentment. It might be said that he regarded his father as he regarded the weather, fatalistically. No more than against the weather would he have dreamed of bearing malice against his father, even had such a plan not been unwise and dangerous. He was convinced that his father's interest in him was about the same as the sun's interest in him. His father was nearly always wrapped in business affairs, and seemed to come to the trifling affairs of Edwin with difficulty, as out of an absorbing engrossment.

Assuredly he would have been amazed to know that his father had been thinking of him all the afternoon and evening. But it was so. Darius Clayhanger had been nervous as to the manner in which the boy would acquit himself in the bit of business which had been confided to him. It was the boy's first bit of business. Straightforward as it was, the boy might muddle it, might omit a portion of it, might say the wrong thing, might forget. Darius hoped for the best, but he was afraid. He saw in his son an amiable irresponsible fool. He compared Edwin at sixteen with himself at the same age. Edwin had never had a care, never suffered a privation, never been forced to think for himself. (Darius might more justly have put it—never been allowed to think for himself.) Edwin had lived in cotton-wool, and knew less of the world than his father had known at half his years ; much less. Darius was sure that Edwin had never even come near suspecting the miracles which his father had accomplished : this was true, and not merely was Edwin stupendously ignorant, and even pettily scornful, of realities, but he was ignorant of his own ignorance. Education ! . . . Darius snorted. To Darius it seemed that Edwin's education was like lying down in an orchard in lovely summer and having ripe fruit dropped into your mouth. . . . A cocky infant ! A girl ! And yet there was something about Edwin

that his father admired, even respected and envied . . . an occasional gesture, an attitude in walking, an intonation, a smile. Edwin, his own son, had a personal distinction that he himself could never compass. Edwin talked more correctly than his father. He thought differently from his father. He had an original grace. In the essence of his being he was superior to both his father and his sisters. Sometimes when his father saw him walking along the street, or coming into a room, or uttering some simple phrase, or shrugging his shoulders, Darius was aware of a faint thrill. Pride? Perhaps; but he would never have admitted it. An agreeable perplexity rather—a state of being puzzled how he, so common, had begotten a creature so subtly aristocratic . . . aristocratic was the word. And Edwin seemed so young, fragile, innocent, and defenceless!

IV

Darius advanced into the attic.

“What about that matter of Enoch Peake’s?” he asked, hoping and fearing, really anxious for his son. He defended himself against probable disappointment by preparing to lapse into savage paternal pessimism and disgust at the futility of an offspring nursed in luxury.

“Oh! It’s all right,” said Edwin eagerly. “Mr. Peake sent word he couldn’t come, and he wanted you to go across to the Dragon this evening. So I went instead.” It sounded dashingly capable.

He finished the recital, and added that of course Big James had not been able to proceed with the job.

“And where’s the proof?” demanded Darius. His relief expressed itself in a superficial surliness; but Edwin was not deceived. As his father gazed mechanically at the proof that Edwin produced hurriedly from his pocket, he added with a negligent air—

“There was a free-and-easy on at the Dragon, father.”

“Was there?” muttered Darius.

Edwin saw that whatever danger had existed was now over.

“And I suppose,” said Darius, with assumed grimness, “if I hadn’t happened to ha’ seen a light from th’ bottom o’ th’ attic stairs I should never have known aught about all

this here ? ” He indicated the cleansed attic, the table, the lamp, and the apparatus of art.

“ Oh yes, you would, father ! ” Edwin reassured him.

Darius came nearer. They were close together, Edwin twisted on the cane chair, and his father almost over him. The lamp smelt, and gave off a stuffy warmth ; the open window, through which came a wandering air, was a black oblong ; the triangular side walls of the dormer shut them intimately in ; the house slept.

“ What art up to ? ”

The tone was benignant. Edwin had not been ordered abruptly off to bed, with a reprimand for late hours and silly proceedings generally. He sought the reason in vain. One reason was that Darius Clayhanger had made a grand bargain at Manchester in the purchase of a second-hand printing machine.

“ I’m copying this,” he replied slowly, and then all the details tumbled rashly out of his mouth, one after the other. “ Oh, father ! I found this book in the shop, packed away on a top shelf, and I want to borrow it. I only want to borrow it. And I’ve bought this paint-box, out of auntie’s half-sovereign. I paid Miss Ingamells the full price. . . . I thought I’d have a go at some of these architecture things.”

Darius glared at the copy.

“ Humph ! ”

“ It’s only just started, you know.”

“ Them prize books—have ye done all that ? ”

“ Yes, father.”

“ And put all the prices down, as I told ye ? ”

“ Yes, father.”

Then a pause. Edwin’s heart was beating hard.

“ I want to do some of these architecture things,” he repeated. No remark from his father. Then he said, fastening his gaze intensely on the table : “ You know, father, what I should really like to be—I should like to be an architect.”

It was out. He had said it.

“ Should ye ? ” said his father, who attached no importance of any kind to this avowal of a preference. “ Well, what you want is a bit o’ business training for a start, I’m thinking.”

“ Oh, of course ! ” Edwin concurred, with pathetic eager-

ness, and added a piece of information for his father : " I'm only sixteen, aren't I? "

" Sixteen ought to ha' been in bed this two hours and more. Off with ye ! "

Edwin retired in an extraordinary state of relief and happiness.

CHAPTER XII

MACHINERY

I

RATHER more than a week later, Edwin had so far entered into the life of his father's business that he could fully share the excitement caused by an impending solemnity in the printing office. He was somewhat pleased with himself, and especially with his seriousness. The memory of school was slipping away from him in the most extraordinary manner. His only school-friend, Charlie Orgreave, had departed, with all the multitudinous Orgreaves, for a month in Wales. He might have written to the Sunday ; the Sunday might have written to him : but the idea of writing did not occur to either of them ; they were both still sufficiently childlike to accept with fatalism all the consequences of parental caprice. Orgreave senior had taken his family to Wales ; the boys were thus separated, and there was an end of it. Edwin regretted this, because Orgreave senior happened to be a very successful architect, and hence there were possibilities of getting into an architectural atmosphere. He had never been inside the home of the Sunday, nor the Sunday in his—a schoolboy friendship can flourish in perfect independence of home—but he nervously hoped that on the return of the Orgreave regiment from Wales, something favourable to his ambitions—he knew not what—would come to pass. In the meantime he was conscientiously doing his best to acquire a business training, as his father had suggested. He gave himself with an enthusiasm almost religious to the study of business methods. All the force of his resolve to perfect himself went for the moment into this immediate enterprise, and he was sorry that business methods were not more complex, mysterious, and original than they seemed to be : he

was also sorry that his father did not show a greater interest in his industry and progress.

He no longer wanted to 'play' now. He despised play. His unique wish was to work. It struck him as curious and delightful that he really enjoyed work. Work had indeed become play. He could not do enough work to satisfy his appetite. And after the work of the day, scorning all silly notions about exercise and relaxation, he would spend the evening in his beautiful new attic, copying designs, which he would sometimes rise early to finish. He thought he had conquered the gross body, and that it was of no account. Even the desolating failures which his copies invariably proved did not much discourage him ; besides, one of them had impressed both Maggie and Clara. He copied with laborious ardour undiminished. And further, he masterfully appropriated Maggie's ticket for the Free Library, pending the preliminaries to the possession of a ticket of his own, to procure a volume on architecture. From timidity, from a singular false shame, he kept this volume in the attic, like a crime ; nobody knew what the volume was. Evidence of a strange trait in his character ; a trait perhaps not defensible ! He argued with himself that having told his father plainly that he wanted to be an architect, he need do nothing else aggressive for the present. He had agreed to the suggestion about business training, and he must be loyal to his agreement. He pointed out to himself how right his father was. At sixteen one could scarcely begin to be an architect ; it was too soon ; and a good business training would not be out of place in any career or profession.

He was so wrapped up in his days and his nights that he forgot to inquire why earthenware was made in just the Five Towns. He had grown too serious for trifles—and all in about a week ! True, he was feeling the temporary excitement of the printing office, which was perhaps expressed boyishly by the printing staff ; but he reckoned that his share of it was quite adult, frowningly superior, and in a strictly business sense justifiable and even proper.

II

Darius Clayhanger's printing office was a fine example of the policy of makeshift which governed and still governs the

commercial activity of the Five Towns. It consisted of the first-floor of a nondescript building which stood at the bottom of the irregularly-shaped yard behind the house and shop, and which formed the southern boundary of the Clayhanger premises. The antique building had once been part of an old-fashioned pot-works, but that must have been in the eighteenth century. Kilns and chimneys of all ages, sizes, and tints rose behind it to prove that this part of the town was one of the old manufacturing quarters. The ground-floor of the building, entirely inaccessible from Clayhanger's yard, had a separate entrance of its own in an alley that branched off from Woodisun Bank, ran parallel to Wedgwood Street, and stopped abruptly at the back gate of a saddler's workshop. In the narrow entry you were like a creeping animal amid the undergrowth of a forest of chimneys, ovens, and high blank walls. This ground-floor had been a stable for many years; it was now, however, a baker's store-room. Once there had been an interior staircase leading from the ground-floor to the first-floor, but it had been suppressed in order to save floor space, and an exterior staircase constructed with its foot in Clayhanger's yard. To meet the requirement of the staircase, one of the first-floor windows had been transformed into a door. Further, as the staircase came against one of the ground-floor windows, and as Clayhanger's predecessor had objected to those alien windows overlooking his yard, and as numerous windows were anyhow unnecessary to a stable, all the ground-floor windows had been closed up with oddments of brick and tile, giving to the wall a very variegated and chequered appearance. Thus the ground-floor and the first-floor were absolutely divorced, the former having its entrance and light from the public alley, the latter from the private yard.

The first-floor had been a printing office for over seventy years. All the machinery in it had had to be manœuvred up the rickety stairs, or put through one of the windows on either side of the window that had been turned into a door. When Darius Clayhanger, in his audacity, decided to print by steam, many people imagined that he would at last be compelled to rent the ground-floor or to take other premises. But no! The elasticity of the makeshift policy was not yet fully

stretched. Darius, in consultation with a jobbing builder, came happily to the conclusion that he could 'manage,' that he could 'make things do,' by adding to the top of his stairs a little landing for an engine-shed. This was done, and the engine and boiler perched in the air; the shaft of the engine went through the wall; the chimney-pipe of the boiler ran up straight to the level of the roof-ridge, and was stayed with pieces of wire. A new chimney had also been pierced in the middle of the roof, for the uses of a heating stove. The original chimneys had been allowed to fall into decay. Finally, a new large skylight added interest to the roof. In a general way, the building resembled a suit of clothes that had been worn, during four of the seven ages of man, by an untidy husband with a tidy and economical wife, and then given by the wife to a poor relation of a somewhat different figure to finish. All that could be said of it was that it survived and served.

But these considerations occurred to nobody.

III

Edwin, quite unaware that he was an instrument in the hands of his Auntie Clara's Providence, left the shop without due excuse and passed down the long blue-paved yard towards the printing office. He imagined that he was being drawn thither simply by his own curiosity—a curiosity, however which he considered to be justifiable, and even laudable. The yard showed signs that the unusual had lately been happening there. Its brick pavement, in the narrow branch of it that led to the double gates in Woodisun Bank (those gates which said to the casual visitor, 'No admittance except on Business'), was muddy, littered, and damaged, as though a Juggernaut had passed that way. Ladders reclined against the walls. Moreover, one of the windows of the office had been taken out of its frame, leaving naught but an oblong aperture. Through this aperture, Edwin could see the busy, eager forms of his father, Big James, and Chawner. Through this aperture had been lifted, in parts and by the employment of every possible combination of lever and pulley, the printing machine which Darius Clayhanger had so successfully

purchased in Manchester on the day of the free-and-easy at the Dragon.

At the top of the flight of steps two apprentices, one nearly 'out of his time,' were ministering to the engine, which that morning did not happen to be running. The engine, giving glory to the entire establishment by virtue of the imposing word 'steam,' was a crotchety and capricious thing, constant only in its tendency to break down. No more reliance could be placed on it than on a pampered donkey. Sometimes it would run, and sometimes it would not run, but nobody could safely prophesy its moods. Of the several machines it drove but one, the grand cylinder, the last triumph of the ingenuity of man, and even that had to be started by hand before the engine would consent to work it. The staff hated the engine, except during those rare hours when one of its willing moods coincided with a pressure of business. Then, when the steam was spluttering and the smoke smoking and the piston throbbing, and the leathern belt travelling round and round and the complete building a-tremble and a-clatter, and an attendant with clean hands was feeding the sheets at one end of the machine and another attendant with clean hands taking them off at the other, all at the rate of twenty copies per sixty seconds—then the staff loved the engine and meditated upon the wonders of their modern civilization. The engine had been known to do its five thousand in an afternoon, and its horse-power was only one.

IV

Edwin could not keep out of the printing office. He went inconspicuously and, as it were, by accident up the stone steps, and disappeared into the interior. When you entered the office you were first of all impressed by the multiplicity of odours competing for your attention, the chief among them being those of ink, oil, and paraffin. Despite the fact that the door was open and one window gone, the smell and heat in the office on that warm morning were notable. Old sheets of the "Manchester Examiner" had been pinned over the skylight to keep out the sun, but, as these were torn and rent, the sun was not kept out. Nobody, however, seemed to suffer

inconvenience. After the odours, the remarkable feature of the place was the quantity of machinery on its uneven floor. Timid employees had occasionally suggested to Darius that the floor might yield one day and add themselves and all the machinery to the baker's stores below ; but Darius knew that floors never did yield.

In the middle of the floor was a huge and heavy heating stove, whose pipe ran straight upwards to the visible roof. The mighty cylinder machine stood to the left hand. Behind was a small rough-and-ready binding department with a guillotine cutting machine, a cardboard-cutting machine, and a perforating machine, trifles by the side of the cylinder, but still each of them formidable masses of metal heavy enough to crush a horse ; the cutting machines might have served to illustrate the French Revolution, and the perforating machine the Holy Inquisition.

Then there was what was called in the office the 'old machine,' a relic of Clayhanger's predecessor, and at least eighty years old. It was one of those machines whose worn physiognomies, full of character, show at once that they have a history. In construction it carried solidity to an absurd degree. Its pillars were like the piles of a pier. Once, in a historic rat-catching, a rat had got up one of them, and a piece of smouldering brown paper had done what a terrier could not do. The machine at one period of its career had been enlarged, and the neat seaming of the metal was an ecstasy to the eye of a good workman. Long ago, it was known, this machine had printed a Reform newspaper at Stockport. Now, after thus participating in the violent politics of an age heroic and unhappy, it had been put to printing small posters of auctions and tea-meetings. Its movement was double : first that of a handle to bring the bed under the platen, and second, a lever pulled over to make contact between the type and the paper. It still worked perfectly. It was so solid, and it had been so honestly made, that it could never get out of order nor wear away. And, indeed, the conscientiousness and skill of artificers in the eighteenth century are still, through that resistless machine, producing their effect in the twentieth. But it needed a strong hand to bestir its smooth plum-coloured limbs of metal, and a

speed of a hundred an hour meant gentle perspiration. The machine was loved like an animal.

Near this honourable and lumbering survival stood pertly an Empire treadle-machine for printing envelopes and similar trifles. It was new, and full of natty little devices. It worked with the lightness of something unsubstantial. A child could actuate it, and it would print delicately a thousand envelopes an hour. This machine, with the latest purchase, which was away at the other end of the room near the large double-pointed case-rack, completed the tales of machines. That case-rack alone held fifty different founts of type, and there were other case-racks. The lead-rack was nearly as large, and beneath the lead-rack was a rack containing all those 'furnitures' which help to hold a forme of type together without betraying themselves to the reader of the printed sheet. And under the furniture rack was the 'random,' full of galleys. Then there was a table with a top of solid stone, upon which the formes were bolted up. And there was the ink-slab, another solidity, upon which the ink-rollers were inked. Rollers of various weightiness lay about, and large heavy cans, and many bottles, and metal galleys, and nameless fragments of metal. Everything contributed to the impression of immense ponderosity exceeding the imagination. The fancy of being pinned down by even the lightest of these constructions was excruciating. You moved about in narrow alleys among upstanding, unyielding metallic enormities, and you felt fragile and perilously soft.

v

The only unintimidating phenomena in the crowded place were the lye-brushes, the dusty job-files that hung from the great transverse beams, and the proof-sheets that were scattered about. These printed things showed to what extent Darius Clayhanger's establishment was a channel through which the life of the town had somehow to pass. Auctions, meetings, concerts, sermons, improving lectures, miscellaneous entertainments, programmes, catalogues, deaths, births, marriages, specifications, municipal notices, summonses, demands, receipts, subscription-lists, accounts, rate-forms, lists of voters, jury-lists, inaugurations, closures, billheads, hand-

bills, addresses, visiting-cards, society rules, bargain-sales, lost and found notices : traces of all these matters, and more, were to be found in that office ; it was impregnated with the human interest ; it was dusty with the human interest ; its hot smell seemed to you to come off life itself, if the real sentiment and love of life were sufficiently in you. A grand, stuffy, living, seething place, with all its metallic immobility !

VI

Edwin sidled towards the centre of interest, the new machine, which, however, was not a new machine. Darius Clayhanger did not buy more new things than he could help. His delight was to ' pick up ' articles that were supposed to be ' as good as new ' ; occasionally he would even assert that an object bought second-hand was ' better than new,' because it had been ' broken in,' as if it were a horse. Nevertheless, the latest machine was, for a printing machine, nearly new : its age was four years only. It was a Demy Columbian Press, similar in conception and movement to the historic ' old machine ' that had been through the Reform agitation ; but how much lighter, how much handier, how much more ingenious and precise in the detail of its working ! A beautiful edifice, as it stood there, gazed on admiringly by the expert eyes of Darius, in his shirt-sleeves, Big James, in his royally flowing apron, and Chawner, the journeyman compositor, who, with the two apprentices outside, completed the staff ! Aided by no mechanic more skilled than a day-labourer, those men had got the machine piecemeal into the office, and had duly erected it. At that day a foreman had to be equal to anything.

The machine appeared so majestic there, so solid and immovable, that it might ever have existed where it then was. Who could credit that, less than a fortnight earlier, it had stood equally majestic, solid, and immovable in Manchester ? There remained nothing to show how the miracle had been accomplished, except a bandage of ropes round the lower pillars and some pulley-tackle hanging from one of the transverse beams exactly overhead. The situation of the machine in the workshop had been fixed partly by that beam above and partly by the run of the beams that supported the floor. The

stout roof-beam enabled the artificers to handle the great masses by means of the tackle ; and as for the floor-beams, Darius had so far listened to warnings as to take them into account.

VII

“ Take another impress, James,” said Darius. And when he saw Edwin, instead of asking the youth what he was wasting his time there for, he good-humouredly added : “ Just watch this, my lad.” Darius was pleased with himself, his men, and his acquisition. He was in one of his mood. when he could charm ; he was jolly, and he held up his chins. Two days before, so interested had he been in the Demy Columbian, he had actually gone through a bilious attack while scarcely noticing it ! And now the whole complex operation had been brought to a triumphant conclusion.

Big James inserted the sheet of paper, with gentle and fine movements. The journeyman turned the handle, and the bed of the machine slid horizontally forward in frictionless, stately silence. And then Big James seized the lever with his hairy arm bared to the elbow, and pulled it over. The delicate process was done with minute and level exactitude ; adjusted to the thirty-second of an inch, the great masses of metal had brought the paper and the type together and separated them again. In another moment Big James drew out the sheet, and the three men inspected it, each leaning over it. A perfect impression !

“ Well,” said Darius, glowing, “ we’ve had a bit o’ luck in getting that up ! Never had less trouble ! Shows we can do better without those Foundry chaps than with ’em ! James, ye can have a quart brought in, if ye’n a mind, but I won’t have them apprentices drinking ! No, I won’t ! Mrs. Nixon’ll give ’em some nettle-beer if they fancy it.”

He was benignant. The inauguration of a new machine deserved solemn recognition, especially on a hot day. It was an event.

“ An infant in arms could turn this here,” murmured the journeyman, toying with the handle that moved the bed. It was an exaggeration, but an excusable, poetical exaggeration.

Big James wiped his wrists on his apron.

VIII

Then there was a queer sound of cracking somewhere, vague, faint, and yet formidable. Darius was standing between the machines and the dismantled window, his back to the latter. Big James and the journeyman rushed instinctively from the centre of the floor towards him. In a second the journeyman was on the window-sill.

"What art doing?" Darius demanded roughly; but there was no sincerity in his voice.

"Th' floor!" the journeyman excitedly exclaimed.

Big James stood close to the wall.

"And what about th' floor?" Darius challenged him obstinately.

"One o' them beams is a-going," stammered the journeyman.

"Rubbish!" shouted Darius. But simultaneously he motioned to Edwin to move from the middle of the room, and Edwin obeyed. All four listened, with nerves stretched to the tightest. Darius was biting his lower lip with his upper teeth. His humour had swiftly changed to the savage. Every warning that had been uttered for years past concerning that floor was remembered with startling distinctness. Every impatient reassurance offered by Darius for years past suddenly seemed fatuous and perverse. How could any man in his senses expect the old floor to withstand such a terrific strain as that to which Darius had at last dared to subject it? The floor ought by rights to have given way years ago! His men ought to have declined to obey instructions that were obviously insane. These and similar thoughts visited the minds of Big James and the journeyman.

As for Edwin, his excitement was, on balance, pleasurable. In truth, he could not kill in his mind the hope that the floor would yield. The greatness of the resulting catastrophe fascinated him. He knew that he should be disappointed if the catastrophe did not occur. That it would mean ruinous damage to the extent of hundreds of pounds, and enormous worry, did not influence him. His reason did not influence him, nor his personal danger. He saw a large hook in the wall to which he could cling when the exquisite crash came, and pictured a welter of broken machinery and timber ten feet

below him, and the immense pother that the affair would create in the town.

IX

Darius would not loose his belief in his floor. He hugged it in mute fury. He would not climb on to the window-sill, nor tell Big James to do so, nor even Edwin. On the subject of the floor he was religious ; he was above the appeal of the intelligence. He had always held passionately that the floor was immovable, and he always would. He had finally convinced himself of its omnipotent strength by the long process of assertion and reassertion. When a voice within him murmured that his belief in the floor had no scientific basis, he strangled the voice. So he remained, motionless, between the window and the machine.

No sound ! No slightest sound ! No tremor of the machine ! But Darius's breathing could be heard after a moment.

He guffawed sneeringly.

" And what next ? " he defiantly asked, scowling. " What's amiss wi' ye all ? " He put his hands in his pockets. " Dun ye mean to tell me as——"

The younger apprentice entered from the engine-shed.

" Get back there ! " rolled and thundered the voice of Big James. It was the first word he had spoken, and he did not speak it in frantic, hysteric command, but with a terrible and convincing mildness. The phrase fell on the apprentice like a sandbag, and he vanished.

Darius said nothing. There was another cracking sound, louder, and unmistakably beneath the bed of the machine. And at the same instant a flake of grimy plaster detached itself from the opposite wall and dropped into pale dust on the floor. And still Darius religiously did not move, and Big James would not move. They might have been under a spell. the journeyman jumped down incautiously into the yard.

X

And then Edwin, hardly knowing what he did, and certainly not knowing why he did it, walked quickly out on to the floor, seized the huge hook attached to the lower pulley of the tackle that hung from the roof-beam, pulled up the slack of the rope-bandage on the hind part of the machine, and stuck the hook

into it, then walked quickly back. The hauling-rope of the tackle had been carried to the iron ring of a trap-door in the corner near Big James ; this trap-door, once the outlet of the interior staircase from the ground-floor, had been nailed down many years previously. Big James dropped to his knees and tightened and knotted the rope. Another and much louder noise of cracking followed, the floor visibly yielded, and the hind part of the machine visibly sank about a quarter of an inch. But no more. The tackle held. The strain was distributed between the beam above and the beam below, and equilibrium established.

"Out ! Lad ! Out !" cried Darius feebly, in the wreck, not of his workshop, but of his religion. And Edwin fled down the steps, pushing the mystified apprentices before him, and followed by the men. In the yard the journeyman, entirely self-centred, was hopping about on one leg and cursing.

XI

Darius, Big James, and Edwin stared in the morning sunshine at the aperture of the window and listened.

"Nay !" said Big James, after an eternity. "He's saved it ! He's saved th' old shop ! But by gum—by gum——"

Darius turned to Edwin, and tried to say something ; and then Edwin saw his father's face working into monstrous angular shapes, and saw the tears spurt out of his eyes, and was clutched convulsively in his father's shirt-sleeved arms. He was very proud, very pleased, but he did not like this embrace ; it made him feel ashamed. He thought how Clara would have sniggered about it and caricatured it afterwards, had she witnessed it. And although he had incontestably done something which was very wonderful and very heroic, and which proved in him the most extraordinary presence of mind, he could not honestly glorify himself in his own heart, because it appeared to him that he had acted exactly like an automaton. He blankly marvelled, and thought the situation agreeably thrilling, if somewhat awkward. His father let him go. Then all Edwin's feelings gave place to an immense stupefaction at his father's truly remarkable behaviour. What ! His father emotional ! He had to begin to revise again his settled views.

CHAPTER XIII

ONE RESULT OF COURAGE

I

BY the next morning a certain tranquillity was restored. It was only in this relative calm that the Clayhanger family and its dependants began to realize the intensity of the experience through which they had passed, and, in particular, the strain of waiting for events after the printing office had been abandoned by its denizens. The rumour of what had happened, and of what might have happened, had spread about the premises in an instant, and in another instant all the women had collected in the yard; even Miss Ingamells had betrayed the sacred charge of the shop. Ten people were in the yard, staring at the window aperture on the first-floor and listening for ruin. Some time had elapsed before Darius would allow anybody even to mount the steps. Then the baker, the tenant of the ground-floor, had had to be fetched. A pleasant, bland man, he had consented in advance to every suggestion; he had practically made Darius a present of the ground-floor, if Darius possessed the courage to go into it, or to send others into it. The seat of deliberation had then been transferred to the alley behind. And the jobbing builder and carpenters had been fetched, and there was a palaver of tremendous length and solemnity. For hours nothing definite seemed to happen; no one ate or drank, and the current of life at the corner of Trafalgar Road and Wedgwood Street ceased to flow. Boys and men who had heard of the affair, and who had the divine gift of curiosity, gazed in rapture at the 'No Admittance' notice on the ramshackle double gates in Woodisun Bank. It seemed that they might never be rewarded, but their great faith was justified when a hand-cart, bearing several beams three yards long, halted at the gates and was, after a pause, laboriously pushed past

them and round the corner into the alley and up the alley. The alley had been crammed to witness the taking of the beams into the baker's store-room. If the floor above had decided to yield, the noble, negligent carpenters would have been crushed beneath tons of machinery. At length a forest of pillars stood planted on the ground-floor amid the baker's lumber; every beam was duly supported, and the experts pronounced that calamity was now inconceivable. Lastly, the tackle on the Demy Columbian had been loosed, and the machine, slightly askew, permitted gently to sink to full rest on the floor: and the result justified the experts.

II

By this time people had started to eat, but informally, as it were apologetically—Passover meals. Evening was at hand. The Clayhangers, later, had met at table. A strange repast! A strange father! The children had difficulty in speaking naturally. And then Mrs. Hamps had come, ebulliently thanking God, and conveying the fact that the town was thrilled and standing utterly amazed in admiration before her heroical nephew. And yet she had said ardently that she was in no way amazed at her nephew's coolness; she would have been surprised if he had shown himself even one degree less cool. From a long study of his character she had foreknown infallibly that in such a crisis as had supervened he would behave precisely as he had behaved. This attitude of Auntie Hamps, however, though it reduced the miraculous to the ordinary-expected, did not diminish Clara's ingenuous awe of Edwin. From a mocker, the child had been temporarily transformed into an unwilling hero-worshipper. Mrs. Hamps having departed, all the family, including Darius, had retired earlier than usual.

And now, on meeting his father and Big James and Miss Ingamells in the queer peace of the morning, in the relaxation after tension, and in the complete realization of the occurrence, Edwin perceived from the demeanour of all that, by an instinctive action extending over perhaps five seconds of time, he had procured for himself a wondrous and apparently permanent respect. Miss Ingamells, when he went vaguely into the freshly-watered shop before breakfast, greeted him

in a new tone, and with startling deference asked him what he thought she had better do in regard to the addressing of a certain parcel. Edwin considered this odd; he considered it illogical; and one consequence of Miss Ingamells's quite sincere attitude was that he despised Miss Ingamells for a moral weakling. He knew that he himself was a moral weakling, but he was sure that he could never bend, never crouch, to such a posture as Miss Ingamells's; that she was obviously sincere only increased his secret scorn.

But his father resembled Miss Ingamells. Edwin had not dreamt that mankind, and especially his father, was characterized by such simplicity. And yet, on reflection, had he not always found in his father a peculiar ingenuousness, which he could not but look down upon? His father, whom he met crossing the yard, spoke to him almost as he might have spoken to a junior partner. It was more than odd; it was against nature, as Edwin had conceived nature.

He was so superior and lofty, yet without intending it, that he made no attempt to put himself in his father's place. He, in the exciting moments between the first cracking sound and the second, had had a vision of wrecked machinery and timber in an abyss at his feet. His father had had a vision far more realistic and terrifying. His father had seen the whole course of his printing business brought to a standstill, and all his savings dragged out of him to pay for reconstruction and for new machinery. His father had seen loss of life which might be accounted to his negligence. His father had seen, with that pessimism which may overtake anybody in a crisis, the ruin of a career, the final frustration of his lifelong daring and obstinacy, and the end of everything. And then he had seen his son suddenly walk forth and save the frightful situation. He had always looked down upon that son as helpless, coddled, incapable of initiative or of boldness. He believed himself to be a highly remarkable man, and existence had taught him that remarkable men seldom or never have remarkable sons. Again and again had he noted the tendency of remarkable men to beget gaping and idle fools. Nevertheless, he had intensely desired to be able to be proud of his son. He had intensely desired to be able, when acquaintances should be sincerely enthusiastic about the merits of his son, to pretend,

insincerely and with pride only half concealed, that his son was quite an ordinary youth.

Now his desire had been fulfilled ; it had been more than fulfilled. The town would chatter about Edwin's presence of mind for a week. Edwin's act would become historic ; it already was historic. And not only was the act in itself wonderful and admirable and epoch-making ; but it proved that Edwin, despite his blondness, his finickingness, his hesitations, had grit. That was the point : the lad had grit ; there was material in the lad of which much could be made. Add to this, the father's mere instinctive gratitude—a gratitude of such unguessed depth that it had prevented him even from being ashamed of having publicly and impulsively embraced his son on the previous morning.

Edwin, in his unconscious egoism, ignored all that.

III

" I've just seen Barlow," said Darius confidently to Edwin. Barlow was the baker. " He's been here afore his rounds. He's willing to sublet me his store-room—so that'll be all right ! Eh ? "

" Yes," said Edwin, seeing that his approval was being sought for.

" We must fix that machine plumb again."

" I suppose the floor's as firm as rocks now ? " Edwin suggested.

" Eh ! Bless ye ! Yes ! " said his father, with a trace of kindly impatience.

The policy of makeshift was to continue. The floor having been stayed with oak, the easiest thing and the least immediately expensive thing was to leave matters as they were. When the baker's stores were cleared from his warehouse, Darius could use the spaces between the pillars for lumber of his own ; and he could either knock an entrance-way through the wall in the yard, or he could open the nailed-down trap-door and patch the ancient stairway within ; or he could do nothing—it would only mean walking out into Woodisun Bank and up the alley each time he wanted access to his lumber !

And yet, after the second cracking sound on the previous day, he had been ready to vow to rent an entirely new and

common-sense printing office somewhere else—if only he should be saved from disaster that once! But he had not quite vowed. And, in any case, a vow to oneself is not a vow to the Virgin. He had escaped from a danger, and the recurrence of the particular danger was impossible. Why then commit follies of prudence, when the existing arrangement of things ‘would do’?

IV

That afternoon Darius Clayhanger, with his most mysterious air of business, told Edwin to follow him into the shop. Several hours of miscellaneous consultative pottering had passed between Darius and his compositors round and about the new printing machine, which was once more plumb and ready for action. For considerably over a week Edwin had been on his father’s general staff without any definite task or occupation having been assigned to him. His father had been too excitedly preoccupied with the arrival and erection of the machine to bestow due thought upon the activities proper to Edwin in the complex dailiness of the business. Now he meant at any rate to begin to put the boy into a suitable niche. The boy had deserved at least that.

At the desk he opened before him the daily and weekly newspaper-book, and explained its system.

“Let’s take the ‘British Mechanic,’” he said.

And he turned to the page where the title “British Mechanic” was written in red ink. Underneath that title were written the names and addresses of fifteen subscribers to the paper. To the right of the names were thirteen columns, representing a quarter of the year. With his customary laboriousness, Darius described the entire process of distribution. The parcel of papers arrived and was counted, and the name of a subscriber scribbled in an abbreviated form on each copy. Some copies had to be delivered by the errand boy; these were handed to the errand boy, and a tick made against each subscriber in the column for the week: other copies were called for by the subscriber, and as each of these was taken away, similarly a tick had to be made against the name of its subscriber. Some copies were paid for in cash in the shop, some were paid in cash to the office boy, some were

paid for monthly, some were paid for quarterly, and some, as Darius said grimly, were never paid for at all. No matter what the method of paying, when a copy was paid for, or thirteen copies were paid for, a crossing tick had to be made in the book for each copy. Thus, for a single quarter of "British Mechanic" nearly two hundred ticks and nearly two hundred crossing ticks had to be made in the book, if the work was properly done. However, it was never properly done—Miss Ingamells being short of leisure and the errand boy utterly unreliable—and Darius wanted it properly done. The total gross profit on a quarter of "British Mechanic" was less than five shillings, and no customers were more exigent and cantankerous than those who bought one penny-worth of goods per week, and had them delivered free, and received three months' credit. Still, that could not be helped. A printer and stationer was compelled by usage to supply papers; and besides, paper subscribers served a purpose as a nucleus of general business.

As with the "British Mechanic," so with seventeen other weeklies. The daily papers were fewer, but the accountancy they caused was even more elaborate. For monthly magazines there was a separate book with a separate system; here the sums involved were vaster, ranging as high as half a crown.

Darius led Edwin with patient minuteness through the whole labyrinth.

"Now," he said, "you're going to have sole charge of all this."

And he said it benevolently, in the conviction that he was awarding a deserved recompense, with the mien of one who was giving dominion to a faithful steward over ten cities.

"Just look into it carefully yerself, lad," he said at last, and left Edwin with a mixed parcel of journals upon which to practise.

Before Edwin's eyes flickered hundreds of names, thousands of figures, and tens of thousands of ticks. His heart protested; it protested with loathing. The prospect stretching far in front of him made him feel sick. But something weak and good-natured in him forced him to smile, and to simulate a subdued ecstacy at receiving this overwhelming proof of his father's confidence in him. As for Darius, Darius was

delighted with himself and with his son, and he felt that he was behaving as a benignant father should. Edwin had proved his grit, proved that he had that uncommunicable quality, 'character,' and had well deserved encouragement.

V

The next morning, in the printing office, Edwin came upon Big James giving a lesson in composing to the younger apprentice, who in theory had 'learned his cases.' Big James held the composing stick in his great left hand, like a match-box, and with his great right thumb and index picked letter after letter from the case, very slowly in order to display the movement, and dropped them into the stick. In his mild, resonant tones he explained that each letter must be picked up unfalteringly in a particular way, so that it would drop face upward into the stick without any intermediate manipulation. And he explained also that the left hand must be held so that the right hand would have to travel to and fro as little as possible. He was revealing the basic mysteries of his craft, and was happy, making the while the broad series of stock pleasantries which have probably been current in composing rooms since printing was invented. Then he was silent, working more and more quickly, till his right hand could scarcely be followed in its twinklings, and the face of the apprentice duly spread in marvel. When the line was finished he drew out the rule, clapped it down on the top of the last row of letters, and gave the composing stick to the apprentice to essay.

The apprentice began to compose with his feet, his shoulders, his mouth, his eyebrows—with all his body except his hands, which nevertheless travelled spaciouly far and wide.

"It's not in seven year, nor in seventy, as you'll learn, young son of a gun!" said Big James.

And, having unsettled the youth to his foundations with a bland thwack across the head, he resumed the composing stick and began again the exposition of the unique smooth movement which is the root of rapid type-setting.

"Here!" said Big James, when the apprentice had behaved worse than ever. "Us'll ask Mr. Edwin to have a go. Us'll see what *he'll* do."

And Edwin, sheepish, had to comply. He was in pride bound to surpass the apprentice, and did so.

"There!" said Big James. "What did I tell ye?" He seemed to imply a prophecy that, because Edwin had saved the printing office from destruction two days previously, he would necessarily prove to be a born compositor.

The apprentice deferentially sniggered, and Edwin smiled modestly and awkwardly and departed without having accomplished what he had come to do.

By his own act of cool, nonchalant, unconsidered courage in a crisis, he had, it seemed, definitely proved himself to possess a special aptitude in all branches of the business of printer and stationer. Everybody assumed it. Everybody was pleased. Everybody saw that Providence had been kind to Darius and to his son. The fathers of the town, and the mothers, who liked Edwin's complexion and fair hair, told each other that not every parent was so fortunate as Mr. Clayhanger, and what a blessing it was that the old breed was not after all dying out in those new-fangled days. Edwin could not escape from the universal assumption. He felt it round him as a net which somehow he had to cut.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ARCHITECT

I

ONE morning Edwin was busy in the shop with his own private minion, the paper boy, who went in awe of him. But this was not the same Edwin, though people who could only judge by features, and by the length of trousers and sleeves on legs and arms, might have thought that it was the same Edwin enlarged and corrected. Half a year had passed. The month was February, cold. Mr. Enoch Peake had not merely married Mrs. Louisa Loggerheads, but had died of an apoplexy, leaving behind him Cocknage Gardens, a widow, and his name painted in large letters over the word 'Loggerheads' on the lintel of the Dragon. The steam-printer had done the funeral cards, and had gone to the burial of his hopes of business in that quarter. Many funeral cards had come out of the same printing office during the winter, including that of Mr. Udall, the great marble-player. It seemed uncanny to Edwin that a marble-player whom he had actually seen playing marbles should do anything so solemn as expire. However, Edwin had perfectly lost all interest in marbles; only once in six months had he thought of them—and that once through a funeral card. Also he was growing used to funeral cards. He would enter an order for funeral cards as nonchalantly as an order for butterscotch labels. But it was not deaths and the spectacle of life as seen from the shop that had made another Edwin of him.

What had changed him was the slow daily influence of a large number of trifling habitual duties none of which fully strained his faculties, and the monotony of them, and the constant watchful conventionality of his deportment with customers. He was still a youth, very youthful, but you had

to keep an eye open for his youthfulness if you wished to find it beneath the little man that he had been transformed into. He now took his watch out of his pocket with an absent gesture and look exactly like his father's; and his tones would be a reflection of those of the last important full-sized man with whom he had happened to have been in contact. And though he had not developed into a dandy (finance forbidding), he kept his hair unnaturally straight, and amiably grumbled to Maggie about his collars every fortnight or so. Yes, another Edwin! Yet it must not be assumed that he was growing in discontent, either chronic or acute. On the contrary, the malady of discontent troubled him less and less.

To the paper boy he was a real man. The paper boy accepted him with unreserved fatalism, as Edwin accepted his father. Thus the boy stood passive while Edwin brought business to a standstill by privately perusing the "Manchester Examiner." It was Saturday morning, the morning on which the "Examiner" published its renowned Literary Supplement. All the children read eagerly the Literary Supplement; but Edwin, in virtue of his office, got it first. On the first and second pages was the serial story, by George MacDonald, W. Clark Russell, or Mrs. Lynn Linton; then followed readable extracts from new books, and on the fourth page were selected jokes from "Punch." Edwin somehow always began with the jokes, and in so doing was rather ashamed of his levity. He would skim the jokes, glance at the titles of the new books, and look at the dialogue parts of the serial, while business and the boy waited. There was no hurry then, even though the year had reached 1873 and people were saying that they would soon be at the middle of the seventies; even though the Licensing Act had come into force and publicans were predicting the end of the world. Morning papers were not delivered till ten, eleven, or twelve o'clock in Bursley, and on Saturdays, owing to Edwin's laudable interest in the best periodical literature, they were apt to be delivered later than usual.

II

On this particular morning Edwin was disturbed in his studies by a greater than the paper boy, a greater even than

his father. Mr. Osmond Orgreave came stamping his cold feet into the shop, the floor of which was still a little damp from the watering that preceded its sweeping. Mr. Orgreave, though as far as Edwin knew he had never been in the shop before, went straight to the coke-stove, bent his knees, and began to warm his hands. In this position he opened an interview with Edwin, who dropped the Literary Supplement. Miss Ingamells was momentarily absent.

"Father in?"

"No, sir."

Edwin did not say where his father was, because he had received general instructions never to 'volunteer information' on that point.

"Where is he?"

"He's out, sir."

"Oh! Well! Has he left any instructions about those specifications for the Shawport Board School?"

"No, sir. I'm afraid he hasn't. But I can ask in the printing office."

Mr. Orgreave approached the counter, smiling. His face was angular, rather stout, and harsh, with a grey moustache and a short grey beard, and yet his demeanour and his voice had a jocular, youthful quality. And this was not the only contradiction about him. His clothes were extremely elegant and nice in detail—the whiteness of his linen would have struck the most casual observer—but he seemed to be perfectly oblivious of his clothes, indeed, to show carelessness concerning them. His finger-nails were marvellously tended. But he scribbled in pencil on his cuff, and apparently was not offended by a grey mark on his hand due to touching the top of the stove. The idea in Edwin's head was that Mr. Orgreave must put on a new suit of clothes once a week, and new linen every day, and take a bath about once an hour. The man had no ceremoniousness. Thus, though he had never previously spoken to Edwin, he made no preliminary pretence of not being sure who Edwin was; he chatted with him as though they were old friends and had parted only the day before; he also chatted with him as though they were equals in age, eminence, and wealth. A strange man!

"Now look here!" he said, as the conversation proceeded,

"those specifications are at the Sytch Chapel. If you could come along with me now—I mean *now*—I could give them to you and point out one or two things to you, and perhaps Big James could make a start on them this morning. You see, it's urgent."

So he was familiar with Big James.

"Certainly," said Edwin, excited.

And when he had curtly told the paper boy to do portions of the newspaper job which he had always held the paper boy was absolutely incapable of doing, he sent the boy to find Miss Ingamells, informed her where he was going, and followed Mr. Orgreave out of the shop.

III

"Of course you know Charlie's at school in France," said Mr. Orgreave, as they passed along Wedgwood Street in the direction of St. Luke's Square. He was really very companionable.

"Er—yes!" Edwin replied, nervously explosive, and buttoning up his tight overcoat with an important business air.

"At least it isn't a school—it's a university. Besançon, you know. They take university students much younger there. Oh! He has a rare time—a rare time. Never writes to you, I suppose?"

"No." Edwin gave a short laugh.

Mr. Orgreave laughed aloud. "And he wouldn't to us either, if his mother didn't make a fuss about it. But when he does write, we gather there's no place like Besançon."

"It must be splendid," Edwin said thoughtfully.

"You and he were great chums, weren't you? I know we used to hear about you every day. His mother used to say that we had Clayhanger with every meal." Mr. Orgreave again laughed heartily.

Edwin blushed. He was quite startled, and immensely flattered. What on earth could the Sunday have found to tell them every day about *him*? He, Edwin Clayhanger, a subject of conversation in the household of the Orgreaves, that mysterious household which he had never entered but which he had always pictured to himself as being so finely superior!

Less than a year ago Charlie Orgreave had been 'the Sunday,' had been 'Old Perish-in-the-attempt,' and now he was a student in Besançon University, unapproachable, extraordinarily romantic ; and he, Edwin, remained in his father's shop ! He had been aware that Charlie had gone to Besançon University, but he had not realized it effectively till this moment. The realization blew discontent into a flame, which fed on the further perception that evidently the Orgreave family were a gay, jolly crowd of cronies together, not in the least like parents and children ; their home life must be something fundamentally different from his.

IV

When they had crossed the windy space of St. Luke's Square and reached the top of the Sytch Bank, Mr. Orgreave stopped an instant in front of the Sytch Pottery, and pointed to a large window at the south end that was in process of being boarded up.

"At last !" he murmured with disgust. Then he said : "That's the most beautiful window in Bursley, and perhaps in the Five Towns ; and you see what's happening to it."

Edwin had never heard the word 'beautiful' uttered in quite that tone, except by women, such as Auntie Hamps, about a baby or a valentine or a sermon. But Mr. Orgreave was not a woman ; he was a man of the world, he was almost *the* man of the world ; and the subject of his adjective was a window !

"Why are they boarding it up, Mr. Orgreave ?" Edwin asked.

"Oh ! Ancient lights ! Ancient lights !"

Edwin began to snigger. He thought for an instant that Mr. Orgreave was being jocular over his head, for he could only connect the phrase 'ancient lights' with the meaner organs of a dead animal, exposed, for example, in tripe shops. However, he saw his ineptitude almost simultaneously with the commission of it, and smothered the snigger in becoming gravity. It was clear that he had something to learn in the phraseology employed by architects.

"I should think," said Mr. Orgreave, "I should think

they've been at law about that window for thirty years, if not more. Well, it's over now, seemingly." He gazed at the disappearing window. "What a shame!"

"It is," said Edwin politely.

Mr. Orgreave crossed the road and then stood still to gaze at the façade of the Sytch Pottery. It was a long two-storey building, purest Georgian, of red brick with very elaborate stone facings which contrasted admirably with the austere simplicity of the walls. The porch was lofty, with a majestic flight of steps narrowing to the doors. The ironwork of the basement railings was unusually rich and impressive.

"Ever seen another pot-works like that?" demanded Mr. Orgreave, enthusiastically musing.

"No," said Edwin. Now that the question was put to him, he never *had* seen another pot-works like that.

"There are one or two pretty fine works in the Five Towns," said Mr. Orgreave. "But there's nothing elsewhere to touch this. I nearly always stop and look at it if I'm passing. Just look at the pointing! The pointing alone. . . ."

Edwin had to readjust his ideas. It had never occurred to him to search for anything fine in Bursley. The fact was, he had never opened his eyes at Bursley. Dozens of times he must have passed the Sytch Pottery, and yet not noticed, not suspected, that it differed from any other pot-works: he who dreamed of being an architect!

"You don't think much of it?" said Mr. Orgreave, moving on. "People don't."

"Oh yes! I *do*!" Edwin protested, and with such an air of eager sincerity that Mr. Orgreave turned to glance at him. And in truth he did think that the Sytch Pottery was beautiful. He never would have thought so but for the accident of the walk with Mr. Orgreave; he might have spent his whole life in the town, and never troubled himself a moment about the Sytch Pottery. Nevertheless he now, by an act of sheer faith, suddenly, miraculously and genuinely regarded it as an exquisitely beautiful edifice, on a plane with the edifices of the capitals of Europe, and as a feast for discerning eyes. "I like architecture very much," he added. And this, too, was said with such feverish conviction that Mr. Orgreave was quite moved.

"I must show you my new Sytch Chapel," said Mr. Orgreave gaily.

"Oh! I should like you to show it me," said Edwin.

But he was exceedingly perturbed by misgivings. Here was he wanting to be an architect, and he had never observed the Sytch Pottery! Surely that was an absolute proof that he had no vocation for architecture! And yet now he did most passionately admire the Sytch Pottery. And he was proud to be sharing the admiration of the fine, joyous, superior, luxurious, companionable man, Mr. Orgreave.

V

They went down the Sytch Bank to the new chapel of which Mr. Orgreave, though a churchman, was the architect, in that vague quarter of the world between Bursley and Turnhill. The roof was not on; the scaffolding was extraordinarily interesting and confusing; they bent their heads to pass under low portals; Edwin had the delicious smell of new mortar; they stumbled through sand, mud, cinders and little pools; they climbed a ladder and stepped over a large block of dressed stone, and Mr. Orgreave said—

"This is the gallery we're in, here. You see the scheme of the place now. . . . That hole—only a flue. Now you see what that arch carries—they didn't like it in the plans because they thought it might be mistaken for a church——"

Edwin was receptive.

"Of course it's a very small affair, but it'll cost less per sitting than any other chapel in your circuit, and I fancy it'll look less like a box of bricks." Mr. Orgreave subtly smiled, and Edwin tried to equal his subtlety. "I must show you the elevation some other time—a bit later. What I've been after in it, is to keep it in character with the street. . . . Hi! Dan, there!" Now, Mr. Orgreave was calling across the hollow of the chapel to a fat man in corduroys. "Have you remembered about those blue bricks?"

Perhaps the most captivating phenomenon of all was a little lean-to shed with a real door evidently taken from somewhere else, and a little stove, and a table and a chair. Here Mr. Orgreave had a confabulation with the corduroyed man, who was the builder, and they pored over immense sheets of

coloured plans that lay on the table, and Mr. Orgreave made marks and even sketches on the plans, and the fat man objected to his instructions, and Mr. Orgreave insisted, " Yes, yes ! " And it seemed to Edwin as though the building of the chapel stood still while Mr. Orgreave cogitated and explained ; it seemed to Edwin that he was in the creating-chamber. The atmosphere of the shed was inexpressibly romantic to him. After the fat man had gone Mr. Orgreave took a clothes-brush off a plank that had been roughly nailed on two brackets to the wall, and brushed Edwin's clothes, and Edwin brushed Mr. Orgreave, and then Mr. Orgreave, having run his hand through the brush, lightly brushed his hair with it. All this was part of Edwin's joy.

" Yes," he said, " I think the idea of that arch is splendid."

" You do ? " said Mr. Orgreave quite simply and ingenuously pleased and interested. " You see—with the lie of the ground as it is——"

That was another point that Edwin ought to have thought of by himself—the lie of the ground—but he had not thought of it. Mr. Orgreave went on talking. In the shop he had conveyed the idea that he was tremendously pressed for time ; now he had apparently forgotten time.

" I'm afraid I shall have to be off," said Edwin timidly. And he made a preliminary movement as if to depart.

" And what about those specifications, young man ? " asked Mr. Orgreave, dryly twinkling. He unlocked a drawer in the rickety table. Edwin had forgotten the specifications as successfully as Mr. Orgreave had forgotten time. Throughout the remainder of the day he smelt imaginary mortar.

CHAPTER XV

A DECISION

I

THE next day being the day of rest, Mrs. Nixon arose from her nook at 5.30 a.m. and woke Edwin. She did this from good-nature, and because she could refuse him nothing, and not under any sort of compulsion. Edwin got up at the first call, though he was in no way remarkable for his triumphs over the pillow. Twenty-five minutes later he was crossing Trafalgar Road and entering the school-yard of the Wesleyan Chapel. And from various quarters of the town, other young men, of ages varying from sixteen to fifty, were converging upon the same point. Black night still reigned above the lamplights that flickered in the wind which precedes the dawn, and the mud was frozen. Not merely had these young men to be afoot and abroad, but they had to be ceremoniously dressed. They could not issue forth in flannels and sweater, with a towel round the neck, as for a morning plunge in the river. The day was Sunday, though Sunday had not dawned, and the plunge was into the river of intellectual life. Moreover, they were bound by conscience to be prompt. To have arrived late, even five minutes late, would have spoilt the whole effect. It had to be six o'clock or nothing.

The Young Men's Debating Society was a newly-formed branch of the multifarious activity of the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel. It met on Sunday because Sunday was the only day that would suit everybody ; and at six in the morning for two reasons. The obvious reason was that at any other hour its meetings would clash either with other activities or with the solemnity of Sabbath meals. This obvious reason could not have stood by itself ; it was secretly supported by the recondite reason that the preposterous hour of 6 a.m. appealed power-

fully to something youthful, perverse, silly, fanatical, and fine in the youths. They discovered the ascetic's joy in robbing themselves of sleep and in catching chills, and in disturbing households and chapel-keepers. They thought it was a great thing to be discussing intellectual topics at an hour when a town that ignorantly scorned intellectuality was snoring in all its heavy brutishness. And it was a great thing. They considered themselves the salt of the earth, or of that part of the earth. And I have an idea that they were.

Edwin had joined this Society partly because he did not possess the art of refusing, partly because the notion of it appealed spectacularly to the martyr in him, and partly because it gave him an excuse for ceasing to attend the afternoon Sunday school, which he loathed. Without such an excuse he could never have told his father that he meant to give up Sunday school. He could never have dared to do so. His father had what Edwin deemed to be a superstitious and hypocritical regard for the Sunday school. Darius never went near the Sunday school, and assuredly in business and in home life he did not practise the precepts inculcated at the Sunday school, and yet he always spoke of the Sunday school with what was to Edwin a ridiculous reverence. Another of those problems in his father's character which Edwin gave up in disgust!

II

The Society met in a small classroom. The secretary, arch ascetic, arrived at 5.45 and lit the fire which the chapel-keeper (a man with no enthusiasm whatever for flagellation, the hair-shirt, or intellectuality) had laid but would not get up to light. The chairman of the Society, a little Welshman named Llewellyn Roberts, aged fifty, but a youth because a bachelor, sat on a chair at one side of the incipient fire, and some dozen members sat round the room on forms. A single gas-jet flamed from the ceiling. Everybody wore his overcoat, and within the collars of overcoats could be seen glimpses of rich neck-ties; the hats, some glossy, dotted the hat-rack which ran along two walls. A hymn was sung, and then all knelt, some spreading handkerchiefs on the dusty floor to protect fine trousers, and the chairman invoked the blessing

of God on their discussions. The proper mental and emotional atmosphere was now established. The secretary read the minutes of the last meeting, while the chairman surreptitiously poked the fire with a piece of wood from the lower works of a chair, and then the chairman, as he signed the minutes with a pen dipped in an excise ink-bottle that stood on the narrow mantelpiece, said in his dry voice—

“ I call upon our young friend, Mr. Edwin Clayhanger, to open the debate, ‘ Is Bishop Colenso, considered as a Biblical commentator, a force for good ? ’ ”

“ I’m a damned fool ! ” said Edwin to himself savagely, as he stood on his feet. But to look at his wistful and nervously smiling face, no one would have guessed that he was thus blasphemously swearing in the privacy of his own brain.

He had been entrapped into the situation in which he found himself. It was not until after he had joined the Society that he had learnt of a rule which made it compulsory for every member to speak at every meeting attended, and for every member to open a debate at least once in a year. And this was not all ; the use of notes while the orator was ‘ up ’ was absolutely forbidden. A drastic Society ! It had commended itself to elders by claiming to be a nursery for ready speakers.

III

Edwin had chosen the subject of Bishop Colenso—the ultimate wording of the resolution was not his—because he had been reading about the intellectually adventurous Bishop in the “ Manchester Examiner.” And, although eleven years had passed since the publication of the first part of “ The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined,” the Colenso question was only just filtering down to the thinking classes of the Five Towns ; it was an actuality in the Five Towns, if in abeyance in London. Even Hugh Miller’s “ The Old Red Sandstone ; or New Walks in an Old Field,” then over thirty years old, was still being looked upon as dangerously original in the Five Towns in 1873. However, the effect of its disturbing geological evidence that the earth could scarcely have been begun and finished in a little under a week, was happily nullified by the suicide of its author ; that pistol-shot had been a striking proof of the literal inspiration of the Bible.

Bishop Colenso had, in Edwin, an ingenuous admirer. Edwin stammeringly and hesitatingly gave a preliminary sketch of his life ; how he had been censured by Convocation and deposed from his See by his Metropolitan ; how the Privy Council had decided that the deposition was null and void ; how the ecclesiastical authorities had then circumvented the Privy Council by refusing to pay his salary to the Bishop (which Edwin considered mean) ; how the Bishop had circumvented the ecclesiastical authorities by appealing to the Master of the Rolls, who ordered the ecclesiastical authorities to pay him his arrears of income with interest thereon, unless they were ready to bring him to trial for heresy ; how the said authorities would not bring him to trial for heresy (which Edwin considered to be miserable cowardice on their part) ; how the Bishop had then been publicly excommunicated, without authority ; and how his friends, among whom were some very respectable and powerful people, had made him a present of over three thousand pounds. After this graphic historical survey, Edwin proceeded to the Pentateuchal puzzles, and, without pronouncing an opinion thereon, argued that any commentator who was both learned and sincere must be a force for good, as the Bible had nothing to fear from honest inquiry, etc., etc. Five-sixths of his speech was coloured by phrases and modes of thought which he had picked up in the Wesleyan community, and the other sixth belonged to himself. The speech was moderately bad, but not inferior to many other speeches. It was received in absolute silence. This rather surprised Edwin, because the tone in which the leading members of the Society usually spoke to him indicated that (for reasons which he knew not) they regarded him as a very superior intellect indeed ; and Edwin was not entirely ashamed of the quality of his speech ; in fact, he had feared worse from himself, especially as, since his walk with Mr. Orgreave, he had been quite unable to concentrate his thoughts on Bishop Colenso at all, and had been exceedingly unhappy and apprehensive concerning an affair that bore no kind of relation to the Pentateuch.

IV

The chairman began to speak at once. His function was to call upon the speakers in the order arranged, and to sum up before putting the resolution to the vote. But now he produced surprisingly a speech of his own. He reminded the meeting that in 1860 Bishop Colenso had memorialized the Archbishop of Canterbury against compelling natives who had already more than one wife to renounce polygamy as a condition to baptism in the Christian religion ; he stated that, though there were young men present who were almost infants in arms at that period, he for his part could well remember all the episode, and in particular Bishop Colenso's amazing allegation that he could find no disapproval of polygamy either in the Bible or in the writings of the Ancient Church. He also pointed out that in 1861 Bishop Colenso had argued against the doctrine of Eternal Punishment. He warned the meeting to beware of youthful indiscretions. Every one there assembled of course meant well, and believed what it was a duty to believe, but at the same time . . .

" I shall write father a letter ! " said Edwin to himself. The idea came to him in a flash like a divine succour ; and it seemed to solve all his difficulties—difficulties unconnected with the subject of debate.

V

The chairman went on crossing t's and dotting i's. And soon even Edwin perceived that the chairman was diplomatically and tactfully, yet very firmly, bent upon saving the meeting from any possibility of scandalizing itself and the Wesleyan community. Bishop Colenso must not be approved beneath those roofs. Evidently Edwin had been more persuasive than he dreamt of ; and daring beyond precedent. He had meant to carry his resolution if he could, whereas, it appeared, he ought to have meant to be defeated, in the true interests of revealed religion. The chairman kept referring to his young friend the proposer's brilliant brains, and to the grave danger that lurked in brilliant brains, and the inability of brilliant brains to atone for lack of experience. The meeting had its cue. Young man after young man arose

to snub Bishop Colenso, to hope charitably that Bishop Colenso was sincere, and to insist that no Bishop Colenso should lead *him* to the awful abyss of polygamy, and that no Bishop Colenso should deprive *him* of that unique incentive to righteousness—the doctrine of an everlasting burning hell. Moses was put on his legs again as a serious historian, and the subject of the resolution utterly lost to view. The chairman then remarked that his impartial rôle forbade him to support either side, and the voting showed fourteen against one. They all sang the Doxology, and the chairman pronounced a benediction. The fourteen forgave the one, as one who knew not what he did ; but their demeanour rather too patently showed that they were forgiving under difficulty ; and that it would be as well that this kind of youthful temerariousness was not practised too often. Edwin, in the language of the district, was ‘sneaped.’ Wondering what on earth he after all *had* said to raise such an alarm, he nevertheless did not feel resentful, only very depressed—about the debate and about other things. He knew in his heart that for him attendance at the meetings of the Young Men’s Debating Society was ridiculous.

VI

He allowed all the rest to precede him from the room. When he was alone he smiled sheepishly, and also disdainfully ; he knew that the chasm between himself and the others was a real chasm, and not a figment of his childish diffidence, as he had sometimes suspected it to be. Then he turned the gas out. A beautiful faint silver surged through the window. While the debate was in progress, the sun had been going about its business of the dawn, unperceived.

“ I shall write a letter ! ” he kept saying to himself. “ He’ll never let me explain myself properly if I start talking. I shall write a letter. I can write a very good letter, and he’ll be bound to take notice of it. He’ll never be able to get over my letter.”

In the schoolyard daylight reigned. The debaters had already disappeared. Trafalgar Road and Duck Bank were empty and silent under rosy clouds. Instead of going straight home Edwin went past the Town Hall and through the Market

Place to the Sytch Pottery. Astounding that he had never noticed for himself how beautiful the building was ! It was a simply lovely building !

“ Yes,” he said, “ I shall write him a letter, and this very day, too ! May I be hung, drawn, and quartered if he doesn’t have to read my letter to-morrow morning ! ”

CHAPTER XVI

THE LETTER

I

THEN there was roast goose for dinner, and Clara amused herself by making silly facetious faces, furtively, dangerously, under her father's very eyes. The children feared goose for their father, whose digestion was usually unequal to this particular bird. Like many fathers of families in the Five Towns, he had the habit of going forth on Saturday mornings to the butcher's or the poulterer's and buying Sunday's dinner. He was a fairly good judge of a joint, but Maggie considered herself to be his superior in this respect. However, Darius was not prepared to learn from Maggie, and his purchases had to be accepted without criticism. At a given meal Darius would never admit that anything chosen and bought by him was not perfect ; but a week afterwards, if the fact was so, he would of his own accord recall imperfections in that which he had asserted to be perfect ; and he would do this without any shame, without any apparent sense of inconsistency or weakness. Edwin noticed a similar trait in other grown-up persons, and it astonished him. It astonished him especially in his father, who, despite the faults and vulgarities which his fastidious son could find in him, always impressed Edwin as a strong man, a man with the heroic quality of not caring too much what other people thought.

When Edwin saw his father take a second plateful of goose, with the deadly stuffing thereof—Darius simply could not resist it, like most dyspeptics he was somewhat greedy—he foresaw an indisposed and perilous father for the morrow. Which prevision was supported by Clara's pantomimic antics, and even by Maggie's grave and restrained sigh. Still, he had sworn to write and send the letter, and he should do so.

A career, a lifetime, was not to be at the mercy of a bilious attack, surely ! Such a notion offended logic and proportion, and he scorned it away.

II

The meal proceeded in silence. Darius, as in duty bound, mentioned the sermon, but neither Clara nor Edwin would have anything to do with the sermon, and Maggie had not been to chapel. Clara and Edwin felt themselves free of piety till six o'clock at least, and they doggedly would not respond. And Darius from prudence did not insist, for he had arrived at chapel unthinkably late—during the second chant—and Clara was capable of audacious remarks upon occasions. The silence grew stolid.

And Edwin wondered what the dinner-table of the Orgreaves was like. And he could smell fresh mortar. And he dreamed of a romantic life—he knew not what kind of life, but something different fundamentally from his own. He suddenly understood, understood with sympathy, the impulse which had made boys run away to sea. He could feel the open sea ; he could feel the breath of freedom on his cheek.

He said to himself—

“ Why shouldn't I break this ghastly silence by telling father out loud here that he mustn't forget what I told him that night in the attic ? I'm going to be an architect. I'm not going to be any blooming printer. I'm going to be an architect. Why haven't I mentioned it before ? Why haven't I talked about it all the time ? Because I am an ass ! Because there is no word for what I am ! Damn it ! I suppose I'm the person to choose what I'm going to be ! I suppose it's my business more than his. Besides, he can't possibly refuse me. If I say flatly that I won't be a printer—he's done. This idea of writing a letter is just like me ! Coward ! Coward ! What's my tongue for ? Can't I talk ? Isn't he bound to listen ? All I have to do is to open my mouth. He's sitting there. I'm sitting here. He can't eat me. I'm in my rights. Now suppose I start on it as soon as Mrs. Nixon has brought the pudding and pie in ? ”

And he waited anxiously to see whether he indeed would be able to make a start after the departure of Mrs. Nixon.

III

Hopeless! He could not bring himself to do it. It was strange! It was disgusting! . . . No, he would be compelled to write the letter. Besides, the letter would be more effective. His father could not interrupt a letter by some loud illogical remark. Thus he salved his self-conceit. He also sought relief in reflecting savagely upon the speeches that had been made against him in the debate. He went through them all in his mind. There was the slimy idiot from Baines's (it was in such terms that his thoughts ran) who gloried in never having read a word of Colenso, and called the assembled company to witness that nothing should ever induce him to read such a godless author, . . . going about in the mask of a so-called Bishop. But had any of them read Colenso, except possibly Llewellyn Roberts, who in his Welsh way would pretend ignorance and then come out with a quotation and refer you to the exact page? Edwin himself had read very little of Colenso—and that little only because a customer had ordered the second part of the "Pentateuch" and he had stolen it for a night. Colenso was not in the Free Library. . . . What a world! What a debate! Still, he could not help dwelling with pleasure on Mr. Roberts's insistence on the brilliant quality of his brains. Astute as Mr. Roberts was, the man was clearly in awe of Edwin's brains! Why? To be honest, Edwin had never been deeply struck by his own brain power. And yet there must be something in it!

"Of course," he reflected sardonically, "father doesn't show the faintest interest in the debate. Yet he knew all about it, and that I had to open it." But he was glad that his father showed no interest in the debate. Clara had mentioned it in the presence of Maggie, with her usual ironic intent, and Edwin had quickly shut her up.

IV

In the afternoon, the sitting-room being made uninhabitable by his father's goose-ridden dozes, he went out for a walk; the weather was cold and fine. When he returned his father also had gone out; the two girls were lolling in the sitting-room. And immense fire, built up by Darius, was just ripe for the

beginning of decay, and the room very warm. Clara was at the window, Maggie in Darius's chair reading a novel of Charlotte M. Yonge's. On the table, open, was a bound volume of "The Family Treasury of Sunday Reading," in which Clara had been perusing "The Chronicles of the Schönberg-Cotta Family" with feverish interest. Edwin had laughed at her ingenuous absorption in the adventures of the Schönberg-Cotta family, but the fact was that he had found them rather interesting, in spite of himself, while pretending the contrary. There was an atmosphere of high obstinate effort and heroic foreignness about the story which stimulated something secret in him that seldom responded to the provocation of a book; more easily would this secret something respond to a calm evening or a distant prospect, or the silence of early morning when by chance he looked out of his window.

The volume of "The Family Treasury," though five years old, was a recent acquisition. It had come into the house through the total disappearance of a customer who had left the loose numbers to be bound in 1869. Edwin dropped sideways on to a chair at the table, spread out his feet to the right, pitched his left elbow a long distance to the left, and, his head resting on his left hand, turned over the pages with his right hand idly. His eye caught titles such as: "The Door was Shut," "My Mother's Voice," "The Heather Mother," "The Only Treasure," "Religion and Business," "Hope to the End," "The Child of our Sunday School," "Satan's Devices," and "Studies of Christian Life and Character," "Hannah More." Then he saw an article about some architecture in Rome, and he read: "In the Sistine picture there is the struggle of a great mind to reduce within the possibilities of art a subject that transcends it. That mind would have shown itself to be greater, truer, at least, in its judgment of the capabilities of art, and more reverent to have let it alone." The seriousness of the whole magazine intimidated him into accepting this pronouncement for a moment, though his brief studies in various encyclopædias had led him to believe that the Sistine Chapel (shown in an illustration in Cazenove) was high beyond any human criticism. His elbow slid on the surface of the table, and in recovering himself he sent "The Family Treasury" on the floor, wrong side

up, with a great noise. Maggie did not move. Clara turned and protested sharply against this sacrilege, and Edwin, out of mere caprice, informed her that her precious magazine was the most stinking silly 'pi' [pious] thing that ever was. With haughty and shocked gestures she gathered up the volume and took it out of the room.

"I say, Mag," Edwin muttered, still leaning his head on his hand, and staring blankly at the wall.

The fire dropped a little in the grate.

"What is it?" asked Maggie, without stirring or looking up.

"Has father said anything to you about me wanting to be an architect?" He spoke with an affectation of dreaminess.

"About you wanting to be an architect?" repeated Maggie in surprise.

"Yes," said Edwin. He knew perfectly well that his father would never have spoken to Maggie on such a subject. But he wanted to open a conversation.

"No fear!" said Maggie. And added in her kindest, most encouraging, elder-sisterly tone: "Why?"

"Oh!" He hesitated, drawling, and then he told her a great deal of what was in his mind. And she carefully put the woolmarker in her book and shut it, and listened to him. And the fire dropped and dropped, comfortably. She did not understand him; obviously she thought his desire to be an architect exceedingly odd; but she sympathized. Her attitude was soothing and fortifying. After all (he reflected) Maggie's all right—there's some sense in Maggie. He could 'get on' with Maggie. For a few moments he was happy and hopeful.

"I thought I'd write him a letter," he said. "You know how he is to talk to."

There was a pause.

"What d'ye think?" he questioned.

"I should," said Maggie.

"Then I shall!" he exclaimed. "How d'ye think he'll take it?"

"Well," said Maggie, "I don't see how he can do aught but take it all right. . . . Depends how you put it, of course."

"Oh, you leave that to me!" said Edwin, with eager confidence. "I shall put it all right. You trust me for that!"

V

Clara danced into the room, flowing over with infantile joy. She had been listening to part of the conversation behind the door.

"So he wants to be an architect! Arch-i-tect! Arch-i-tect!" She half-sang the word in a frenzy of ridicule. She really did dance, and waved her arms. Her eyes glittered, as if in rapture. These singular manifestations of her temperament were caused solely by the strangeness of the idea of Edwin wanting to be an architect. The strange sight of him with his hair cut short or in a new neck-tie affected her in a similar manner.

"Clara, go and put your pinafore on this *instant*!" said Maggie. "You know you oughtn't to leave it off."

"You needn't be so hoity-toity, miss," Clara retorted. But she moved to obey. When she reached the door she turned again and gleefully taunted Edwin. "And it's all because he went for a walk yesterday with Mr. Orgreave! I know! I know! You needn't think I didn't see you, because I did! Arch-i-tect! Arch-i-tect!"

She vanished, on all her springs, spitefully graceful.

"You might almost think that infernal kid was right bang off her head," Edwin muttered crossly. (Still, it was extraordinary how that infernal kid hit on the truth.)

Maggie began to mend the fire.

"Oh, well!" murmured Maggie, conveying to Edwin that no importance must be attached to the chit's chittishness.

He went up to the next flight of stairs to his attic. Dust on the table of his work-attic! Shameful dust! He had not used that attic since Christmas, on the miserable plea that winter was cold and there was no fire-place! He blamed himself for his effeminacy. Where had flown his seriousness, his elaborate plans, his high purposes? A touch of winter had frightened them away. Yes, he blamed himself mercilessly. True it was—as that infernal kid had chanted—a casual half-hour with Mr. Orgreave was alone responsible for his awaken-

ing—at any rate, for his awakening at this particular moment. Still, he was awake—that was the great fact. He was tremendously awake. He had not been asleep; he had only been half-asleep. His intention of becoming an architect had never left him. But, through weakness before his father, through a cowardly desire to avoid disturbance and postpone a crisis, he had let the weeks slide by. Now he was in a groove, in a canyon. He had to get out, and the sooner the better.

A piece of paper, soiled, was pinned on his drawing-board; one or two sketches lay about. He turned the drawing-board over, so that he might use it for a desk on which to write the letter. But he had no habit of writing letters. In the attic was to be found neither ink, pen, paper, nor envelope. He remembered a broken quire of sermon paper in his bedroom; he had used a few sheets of it for notes on Bishop Colenso. These notes had been written in the privacy and warmth of bed, in pencil. But the letter must be done in ink; the letter was too important for pencil; assuredly his father would take exception to pencil. He descended to his sister's room and borrowed Maggie's ink and a pen, and took an envelope, tripping like a thief. Then he sat down to the composition of the letter; but he was obliged to stop almost immediately in order to light the lamp.

VI

This is what he wrote:

“DEAR FATHER,—I dare say you will think it queer me writing you a letter like this, but it is the best thing I can do, and I hope you will excuse me. I dare say you will remember I told you that night when you came home late from Manchester here in the attic that I wanted to be an architect. You replied that what I wanted was business experience. If you say that I have not had enough business experience yet, I agree to that, but I want it to be understood that later on, when it is the proper time, I am to be an architect. You know I am very fond of architecture, and I feel that I must be an architect. I feel I shall not be happy in the printing business because I want to be an architect. I am now nearly seventeen. Perhaps it is too soon yet for me to

be apprenticed to an architect, and so I can go on learning business habits. But I just want it to be understood. I am quite sure you wish me to be happy in life, and I shan't be happy if I am always regretting that I have not gone in for being an architect. I know I shall like architecture.—Your affectionate son,
EDWIN CLAYHANGER."

Then, as an afterthought, he put the date and his address at the top. He meditated a postscript asking for a reply, but decided that this was unnecessary. As he was addressing the envelope Mrs. Nixon called out to him from below to come to tea. He was surprised to find that he had spent over an hour on the letter. He shivered and sneezed.

VII

During tea he felt himself absurdly self-conscious, but nobody seemed to notice his condition. The whole family went to chapel. The letter lay in his pocket, and he might easily have slipped away to the post office with it, but he had had no opportunity to possess himself of a stamp. There was no need to send the letter through the post. He might get up early and put it among the morning's letters. He had decided, however, that it must arrive formally by the postman, and he would not alter his decision. Hence, after chapel, he took a match, and, creeping into the shop, procured a crimson stamp from his father's desk. Then he went forth, by the back way, alone into the streets. The adventure was not so hazardous as it seemed and as it felt. Darius was incurious by nature, though he had brief fevers of curiosity. Thus the life of the children was a demoralizing mixture of rigid discipline and freedom. They were permitted nothing, but, as the years passed, they might take nearly anything. There was small chance of Darius discovering his son's excursion.

In crossing the road from chapel Edwin had opined to his father that the frost was breaking. He was now sure of it. The mud, no longer brittle, yielded to pressure, and there was a trace of dampness in the interstices of the pavement bricks. A thin raw mist was visible in huge spheres round the street lamps. The sky was dark. The few people whom

he encountered seemed to be out upon mysterious errands, seemed to emerge strangely from one gloom and strangely to vanish into another. In the blind, black façades of the streets the public-houses blazed invitingly with gas ; they alone were alive in the weekly death of the town ; and they gleamed everywhere, at every corner ; the town appeared to consist chiefly of public-houses. He dropped the letter into the box in the market-place ; he heard it fall. His heart beat. The deed was now irrevocable. He wondered what Monday held for him. The quiescent melancholy of the town invaded his spirit, and mingled with his own remorseful sorrow for the unstrenuous past, and his apprehensive solicitude about the future. It was not unpleasant, this brooding sadness, half-despondency and half-hope. A man and a woman, arm-in-arm, went by him as he stood unconscious of his conspicuousness under the gas-lamp that lit the post office. They laughed the smothered laugh of intimacy to see a tall boy standing alone there, with no overcoat, gazing at naught. Edwin turned to go home. It occurred to him that nearly all the people he met were couples, arm-in-arm. And he suddenly thought of Florence, the clog-dancer. He had scarcely thought of her for months. The complexity of the interests of life, and the interweaving of its moods, fatigued his mind into an agreeably grave vacuity.

CHAPTER XVII

END OF A STRUGGLE

I

IT was not one of his official bilious attacks that Darius had on the following day ; he only yielded himself up in the complete grand manner when nature absolutely compelled. The goose had not formally beaten him, but neither had he formally beaten the goose. The battle was drawn, and this meant that Darius had a slight headache, a feeling of heavy disgust with the entire polity of the universe, and a disinclination for food. The first and third symptoms he hid as far as possible, from pride : at breakfast he toyed with bacon, from pride, hating bacon. The children knew from his eyes and his guilty gestures that he was not well, but they dared not refer to his condition ; they were bound to pretend that the health of their father flourished in the highest perfection. And they were glad that things were no worse.

On the other hand, Edwin had a sneezing cold which he could not conceal, and Darius inimically inquired what foolishness he had committed to have brought this on himself. Edwin replied that he knew of no cause for it. A deliberate lie ! He knew that he had contracted a chill while writing a letter to his father in an unwarmed attic, and had intensified the chill by going forth to post the letter without his overcoat in a raw evening mist. Obviously, however, he could not have stated the truth. He was uncomfortable at the breakfast-table, but, after the first few moments, less so than during the disturbed night he had feared to be. His father had neither eaten him, nor jumped down his throat, nor performed any of those unpleasant miraculous feats which fathers usually do perform when infuriated by filial foolishness. The letter, therefore, had not been utterly disastrous ; sometimes a letter would ruin a breakfast, for Mr. Clayhanger, with no

consideration for the success of meals, always opened his post before bite or sup. He had had the letter, and still he was ready to talk to his son in the ordinary grim tone of a goose-morrow. Which was to the good. Edwin was now convinced that he had done well to write the letter.

II

But as the day passed, Edwin began to ask himself: "Has he had the letter?" There was no sign of the letter in his father's demeanour, which, while not such as to make it credible that he ever had moods of positive gay roguishness, was almost tolerable, considering his headache and his nausea. Letters occasionally were lost in the post, or delayed. Edwin thought it would be just his usual bad luck if that particular letter, that letter of all letters, should be lost. And the strange thing is that he could not prevent himself from hoping that it indeed was lost. He would prefer it to be lost rather than delayed. He felt that if the postman brought it by the afternoon delivery while he and his father were in the shop together, he should drop down dead. The day continued to pass, and did pass. And the shop was closed. "He'll speak to me after supper," said Edwin. But Darius did not speak to him after supper. Darius put on his hat and overcoat and went out, saying no word except to advise the children to be getting to bed, all of them.

As soon as he was gone Edwin took a candle and returned to the shop. He was convinced now that the letter had not been delivered, but he wished to make conviction sure. He opened the desk. His letter was nearly the first document he saw. It looked affrighting, awful. He dared not read it, to see whether its wording was fortunate or unfortunate. He departed, mystified. Upstairs in his bedroom he had a new copy of an English translation of Victor Hugo's "Notre Dame," which had been ordered by Lawyer Lawton, but would not be called for till the following week, because Lawyer Lawton only called once a fortnight. He had meant to read that book, with due precautions, in bed. But he could not fix attention on it. Impossible for him to follow a single paragraph. He extinguished the candle. Then he heard his father come home. He thought that he scarcely slept all night.

III

The next morning, Tuesday, the girls, between whom and their whispering friend Miss Ingamells something feminine was evidently afoot, left the breakfast-table sooner than usual, not without stifled giggles: upon occasion Maggie would surprisingly meet Clara and Miss Ingamells on their own plane; since Sunday afternoon she had shown no further interest in Edwin's important crisis; she seemed, so far as he could judge, to have fallen back into her customary state of busy apathy.

The man and the young man were alone together. Darius, in his satisfaction at having been delivered so easily from the goose, had taken an extra slice of bacon. Edwin's cold was now fully developed; and Maggie had told him to feed it.

"I suppose you got that letter I wrote you, father, about me going in for architecture," said Edwin. Then he blew his nose to hide his confusion. He was rather startled to hear himself saying those bold words. He thought that he was quite calm and in control of his impulses; but it was not so; his nerves were stretched to the utmost.

Darius said nothing. But Edwin could see his face darkening, and his lower lip heavily falling. He glowered, though not at Edwin. With eyes fixed on the window he glowered into vacancy. The pride went out of Edwin's heart.

"So ye'd leave the printing?" muttered Darius, when he had finished masticating. He spoke in a menacing voice thick with ferocious emotion.

"Well——" said Edwin, quaking.

He thought he had never seen his father so ominously intimidating. He was terrorized as he looked at that ugly and dark countenance. He could not say any more. His voice left him. Thus his fear was physical as well as moral. He reflected: "Well, I expected a row, but I didn't expect it would be as bad as this!" And once more he was completely puzzled and baffled by the enigma of his father.

IV

He did not hold the key, and even had he held it he was too young, too inexperienced, to have used it. As with

gathering passion the eyes of Darius assaulted the window-pane, Darius had a painful intense vision of that miracle, his own career. Edwin's grand misfortune was that he was blind to the miracle. Edwin had never seen the little boy in the Bastille. But Darius saw him always, the infant who had begun life at a rope's-end. Every hour of Darius's present existence was really an astounding marvel to Darius. He could not read the newspaper without thinking how wonderful it was that he should be able to read the newspaper. And it was wonderful! It was wonderful that he had three different suits of clothes, none of them with a single hole. It was wonderful that he had three children, all with complete outfits of good clothes. It was wonderful that he never had to think twice about buying coal, and that he could have more food than he needed. It was wonderful that he was not living in a two-roomed cottage. He never came into his house by the side entrance without feeling proud that the door gave on to a preliminary passage and not direct into a living-room; he would never lose the idea that a lobby, however narrow, was the great distinguishing mark of wealth. It was wonderful that he had a piano, and that his girls could play it and could sing. It was wonderful that he had paid twenty-eight shillings a term for his son's schooling, in addition to book-money. Twenty-eight shillings a term! And once a penny a week was considered enough, and twopence generous! Through sheer splendid wilful pride he had kept his son at school till the lad was sixteen, going in seventeen! Seventeen, not seven! He had had the sort of pride in his son that a man may have in an idle, elegant, and absurdly expensive woman. It even tickled him to hear his son called 'Master Edwin,' and then 'Mister Edwin'; just as the fine ceremonious manners of his sister-in-law Mrs. Hamps tickled him. His marriage! With all its inevitable disillusion it had been wonderful, incredible. He looked back on it as a miracle. For he had married far above him, and had proved equal to the enormously difficult situation. Never had he made a fool of himself. He often took keen pleasure in speculating upon the demeanour of his father, his mother, his little sister, could they have seen him in his purple and in his grandeur. They were all dead. And those

days were fading, fading, gone, with their unutterable, intolerable shame and sadness, intolerable even in memory. And his wife dead too ! All that remained was Mr. Shushions.

And then his business ? Darius's pride in the achievement of his business was simply indescribable. If he had not built up that particular connection he had built up another one whose sale had enabled him to buy it. And he was waxing yearly. His supremacy as a printer could not be challenged in Bursley. Steam ! A double-windowed shop ! A foreman to whom alone he paid thirty shillings a week ! Four other employees ! (Not to mention a domestic servant.) . . . How had he done it ? He did not know. Certainly he did not credit himself with brilliant faculties. He knew he was not brilliant ; he knew that once or twice he had had luck. But he had the greatest confidence in his rough-hewing common sense. The large curves of his career were correctly drawn. His common sense, his slow shrewdness, had been richly justified by events. They had been pitted against foes—and look now at the little boy from the Bastille !

V

To Darius there was no business quite like his own. He admitted that there were businesses much bigger, but they lacked the miraculous quality that his own had. They were not sacred. His was, genuinely. Once, in his triumphant and vain early manhood he had had a fancy for bulldogs ; he had bred bulldogs ; and one day he had sacrificed even that great delight at the call of his business ; and now no one could guess that he knew the difference between a setter and a mastiff !

It was this sacred business (perpetually adored at the secret altar in Darius's heart), this miraculous business, and not another, that Edwin wanted to abandon, with scarcely a word ; just casually !

True, Edwin had told him one night that he would like to be an architect. But Darius had attached no importance to the boyish remark. Darius had never even dreamed that Edwin would not go into the business. It would not have occurred to him to conceive such a possibility. And the boy had shown great aptitude. The boy had saved the printing

office from disaster. And Darius had proved his satisfaction therein, not by words certainly, but beyond mistaking in his general demeanour towards Edwin. And after all that, a letter—mind you, a letter!—proposing with the most damnable insolent audacity that he should be an architect, because he would not be ‘happy’ in the printing business! . . . An architect! Why an architect, specially? What in the name of God was there to attract in bricks and mortar? He thought the boy had gone off his head for a space. He could not think of any other explanation. He had not allowed the letter to upset him. By his armour of thick callousness, he had protected the tender places in his soul from being wounded. He had not decided how to phrase his answer to Edwin. He had not even decided whether he would say anything at all, whether it would not be more dignified and impressive to make no remark whatever to Edwin, to let him slowly perceive, by silence, what a lamentable error he had committed.

And here was the boy lightly, cheekily, talking at breakfast about ‘going in for architecture’! The armour of callousness was pierced. Darius felt the full force of the letter; and as he suffered, so he became terrible and tyrannic in his suffering. He meant to save his business, to put his business before anything. And he would have his own way. He would impose his will. And he would have treated argument as a final insult. All the heavy, obstinate, relentless force of his individuality was now channeled in one tremendous instinct.

VI

“Well, what?” he growled savagely, as Edwin halted.

In spite of his advanced age Edwin began to cry. Yes, the tears came out of his eyes.

“And now you begin blubbing!” said his father.

“You say naught for six months—and then you start writing letters!” said his father.

“And what’s made ye settle on architecting, I’d like to be knowing?” Darius went on.

Edwin was not able to answer this question. He had never put it to himself. Assuredly he could not, at the pistol’s point, explain *why* he wanted to be an architect. He did not know. He announced this truth ingenuously—

"I don't know—I——"

"I sh'd think not!" said his father. "D'ye think architecting 'll be any better than this?" "This" meant printing.

"I don't know——"

"Ye don't know! Ye don't know!" Darius repeated testily. His testiness was only like foam on the great wave of his resentment.

"Mr. Orgreave——" Edwin began. It was unfortunate, because Darius had had a difficulty with Mr. Orgreave, who was notoriously somewhat exacting in the matter of prices.

"Don't talk to me about Mester Orgreave!" Darius almost shouted.

Edwin didn't. He said to himself: "I am lost."

"What's this business o' mine for, if it isna for you?" asked his father. "Architecting! There's neither sense nor reason in it! Neither sense nor reason!"

He rose and walked out. Edwin was now sobbing. In a moment his father returned, and stood in the doorway.

"Ye've been doing well, I'll say that, and I've shown it! I was beginning to have hopes of ye!" It was a great deal to say.

He departed.

"Perhaps if I hadn't stopped his damned old machine from going through the floor, he'd have let me off!" Edwin muttered bitterly. "I've been too good, that's what's the matter with me!"

VII

He saw how fantastic was the whole structure of his hopes. He wondered that he had ever conceived it even wildly possible that his father would consent to architecture as a career! To ask it was to ask absurdly too much of Fate. He demolished, with a violent and resentful impulse, the structure of his hopes; stamped on it angrily. He was beaten. What could he do? He could do nothing against his father. He could no more change his father than the course of a river. He was beaten. He saw his case in its true light.

Mrs. Nixon entered to clear the table. He turned away to hide his face, and strode passionately off. Two hours elapsed before he appeared in the shop. Nobody asked for him, but

Mrs. Nixon knew he was in the attic. At noon, Maggie, with a peculiar look, told him that Auntie Hamps had called and that he was to go and have dinner with her at one o'clock, and that his father consented. Obviously, Maggie knew the facts of the day. He was perturbed at the prospect of the visit. But he was glad; he thought he could not have lived through a dinner at the same table as Clara. He guessed that his auntie had been made aware of the situation and wished to talk to him.

VIII

"Your father came to see me in such a state last night!" said Auntie Hamps, after she had dealt with his frightful cold.

Edwin was astonished by the news. Then, after all, his father had been afraid! . . . After all, perhaps he had yielded too soon! If he had held out. . . . If he had not been a baby! . . . But it was too late. The incident was now closed.

Mrs. Hamps was kind, but unusually firm in her tone; which reached a sort of benevolent severity.

"Your father had such high hopes of you. *Has*—I should say. He couldn't imagine what on earth possessed you to write such a letter. And I'm sure I can't. I hope you're sorry. If you'd seen your father last night you would be, I'm sure."

"But look here, auntie," Edwin defended himself, sneezing and wiping his nose; and he spoke of his desire. Surely he was entitled to ask, to suggest! A son could not be expected to be exactly like his father. And so on.

No! no! She brushed all that aside. She scarcely listened to it.

"But think of the business! And just think of your father's feelings!"

Edwin spoke no more. He saw that she was absolutely incapable of putting herself in his place. He could not have explained her attitude by saying that she had the vast unconscious cruelty which always goes with a perfect lack of imagination; but this was the explanation. He left her, saddened by the obvious conclusion that his auntie, whom

he had always supported against his sisters, was part author of his undoing. She had undoubtedly much strengthened his father against him. He had a gleam of suspicion that his sisters had been right, and he wrong, about Mrs. Hamps. Wonderful, the cruel ruthless insight of girls—into some things !

IX

Not till Saturday did the atmosphere of the Clayhanger household resume the normal. But earlier than that Edwin had already lost his resentment. It disappeared with his cold. He could not continue to bear ill-will. He accepted his destiny of immense disappointment. He shouldered it. You may call him weak or you may call him strong. Maggie said nothing to him of the great affair. What could she have said ? And the affair was so great that even Clara did not dare to exercise upon it her peculiar faculties of ridicule. It abashed her by its magnitude.

On Saturday Darius said to his son, good-humouredly —
“ Canst be trusted to pay wages ? ”

Edwin smiled.

At one o'clock he went across the yard to the printing office with a little bag of money. The younger apprentice was near the door scrubbing type with potash to cleanse it. The backs of his hands were horribly raw and bleeding with chaps, due to the frequent necessity of washing them in order to serve the machines, and the impossibility of drying them properly. Still, winter was ending now, and he only worked eleven hours a day, in an airy room, instead of nineteen hours in a cellar, like the little boy from the Bastille. He was a fortunate youth. The journeyman stood idle ; as often, on Saturdays, the length of the journeyman's apron had been reduced by deliberate tearing during the week from three feet to about a foot—so imperious and sudden was the need for rags in the processes of printing. Big James was folding up his apron. They all saw that Edwin had the bag, and their faces relaxed.

“ You're as good as the master now, Mr. Edwin,” said Big James with ceremonious politeness and a fine gesture, when Edwin had finished paying.

“ Am I ? ” he rejoined simply.

Everybody knew of the great affair. Big James's words were his gentle intimation to Edwin that every one knew the great affair was now settled.

That night, for the first time, Edwin could read "Notre Dame" with understanding and pleasure. He plunged with soft joy into the river of the gigantic and formidable narrative. He reflected that, after all, the sources of happiness were not exhausted.

BOOK II

HIS LOVE

CHAPTER I

THE VISIT

I

WE now approach the more picturesque part of Edwin's career. Seven years passed. Towards the end of April, 1880, on a Saturday morning, Janet Orgreave, second daughter of Osmond Orgreave, the architect, entered the Clayhanger shop.

All night an April shower lasting ten hours had beaten with persistent impetuosity against the window-panes of Bursley, and hence half the town had slept ill. But at breakfast-time the clouds had been mysteriously drawn away, the winds had expired, and those drenched streets began to dry under the caressing peace of bright soft sunshine; the sky was pale blue of a delicacy unknown to the intemperate climes of the south. Janet Orgreave, entering the Clayhanger shop, brought into it with her the new morning weather. She also brought into it Edwin's fate, or part of it, but not precisely in the sense commonly understood when the word 'fate' is mentioned between a young man and a young woman.

A youth stood at the left-hand or 'fancy' counter, very nervous. Miss Ingamells (that was) was married and the mother of three children, and had probably forgotten the difference between 'demy' and 'post' octavos; and this youth had taken her place and the place of two unsatisfactory maids in black who had succeeded her. None but males were now employed in the Clayhanger business, and everybody breathed more freely; round, sound oaths were heard where never oaths had been heard before. The young man's name

was Stifford, and he was addressed as 'Stiff.' He was a proof of the indiscretion of prophesying about human nature. He had been the paper boy, the minion of Edwin, and universally regarded as unreliable and almost worthless. But at sixteen a change had come over him; he parted his hair in the middle instead of at the side, arrived in the morning at 7.59 instead of at 8.5, and seemed to see the earnestness of life. Every one was glad and relieved, but every one took the change as a matter of course; the attitude of every one to the youth was: "Well, it's not too soon!" No one saw a romantic miracle.

"I suppose you haven't got 'The Light of Asia' in stock?" began Janet Orgreave, after she had greeted the youth kindly.

"I'm afraid we haven't, miss," said Stifford. This was an understatement. He knew beyond fear that "The Light of Asia" was not in stock.

"Oh!" murmured Janet.

"I think you said 'The Light of Asia'?"

"Yes. 'The Light of Asia,' by Edwin Arnold." Janet had a persuasive, humane smile.

Stifford was anxious to have the air of obliging this smile, and he turned round to examine a shelf of prize books behind him, well aware that "The Light of Asia" was not among them. He knew "The Light of Asia" and was proud of his knowledge; that is to say, he knew by visible and tactual evidence that such a book existed, for it had been ordered and supplied as a Christmas present four months previously, soon after its dazzling apparition in the world.

"Yes, by Edwin Arnold Edwin Arnold," he muttered learnedly, running his finger along gilded backs.

"It's being talked about a great deal," said Janet as if to encourage him.

"Yes, it is. . . . No, I'm very sorry, we haven't it in stock." Stifford faced her again, and leaned his hands wide apart on the counter.

"I should like you to order it for me," said Janet Orgreave in a low voice.

She asked this exactly as though she were asking a personal favour from Stifford the private individual. Such was Janet's way. She could not help it. People often said that her desire

to please, and her methods of pleasing, were unconscious. These people were wrong. She was perfectly conscious and even deliberate in her actions. She liked to please. She could please easily and she could please keenly. Therefore she strove always to please. Sometimes, when she looked in the mirror, and saw that charming, good-natured face with its rich vermilion lips eager to part in a nice, warm, sympathetic smile, she could accuse herself of being too fond of the art of pleasing. For she was a conscientious girl, and her age being twenty-five her soul was at its prime, full, bursting with beautiful impulses towards perfection. Yes, she would accuse herself of being too happy, too content, and would wonder whether she ought not to seek heaven by some austerity of scowling. Janet had everything: a kind disposition, some brains, some beauty, considerable elegance and luxury for her station, fine shoulders at a ball, universal love and esteem.

Stifford, as he gazed diffidently at this fashionable, superior, and yet exquisitely beseeching woman on the other side of the counter, was in a very unpleasant quandary. She had by her magic transformed him into a private individual, and he acutely wanted to earn that smile which she was giving him. But he could not. He was under the obligation to say 'No' to her innocent and delightful request; and yet could he say 'No'? Could he bring himself to desolate her by a refusal? (She had produced in him the illusion that a refusal would indeed desolate her, though she would of course bear it with sweet fortitude.) Business was a barbaric thing at times.

"The fact is, miss," he said at length, in his best manner, "Mr. Clayhanger has decided to give up the new book business. I'm very sorry."

Had it been another than Janet he would have assuredly said with pride: "We have decided——"

"Really!" said Janet. "I see!"

Then Stifford directed his eyes upon a square glazed structure of ebonized wood that had been insinuated and inserted into the opposite corner of the shop, behind the ledger-window. And Janet's eyes followed his.

"I don't know if——" he hesitated.

"Is Mr. Clayhanger in?" she demanded, as if wishful to help him in the formulation of his idea, and she added: "Or Mr. Edwin?" Deliciously persuasive!

II

The wooden structure was a lair. It had been constructed to hold Darius Clayhanger; but in practice it generally held Edwin, as his father's schemes for the enlargement of the business carried him abroad more and more. It was a device of Edwin's for privacy; Edwin had planned it and seen the plan executed. The theory was that a person concealed in the structure (called 'the office') was not technically in the shop and must not be disturbed by anyone in the shop. Only persons of authority—Darius and Edwin—had the privilege of the office, and since its occupant could hear every whisper in the shop, it was always for the occupant to decide when events demanded that he should emerge.

On Janet's entrance, Edwin was writing in the daybook: "April 11th. Turnhill Oddfellows. 400 Contrib. Cards——" He stopped writing. He held himself still like a startled mouse. With satisfaction he observed that the door of the fortress was closed. By putting his nose near the crystal wall he could see through the minute transparent portions of the patterned glass without being seen. He watched Janet's graceful gestures, and examined with pleasure the beauties of her half-season toilet; he discerned the modishness of her umbrella handle. His sensations were agreeable and yet disagreeable, for he wished both to remain where he was and to go forth and engage her in brilliant small talk. He had no small talk, except that of the salesman and the tradesman; his tongue knew not freedom; but his fancy dreamed of light, intellectual conversations with fine girls. These dreams of fancy had of late become almost habitual, for the sole reason that he had raised his hat several times to Janet and once had shaken hands with her and said, "How d'you do, Miss Orgreave?" in response to her "How d'you do, Mr. Clayhanger?" Osmond Orgreave, in whom had originated their encounter, had cut across the duologue at that point and spoilt it. But Edwin's fancy had continued it, when he was alone late at night, in a very diverting and witty manner.

And now, he had her at his disposal ; he had only to emerge, and Stiff would deferentially recede, and he could chat with her at ease, starting comfortably from "The Light of Asia." And yet he dared not ; his faint heart told him in loud beats that he could only chat cleverly with a fine girl when absolutely alone in his room, in the dark.

Still, he surveyed her ; he added her up ; he pronounced, with a touch of conventional male patronage (caught possibly from the Liberal Club), that Janet was indubitably a nice girl and a fine girl. He would not admit that he was afraid of her, and that despite all theoretical argufying, he deemed her above him in rank.

And if he had known the full truth, he might have regretted that he had not caused the lair to be furnished with a trap-door by means of which the timid could sink into the earth.

The truth was that Janet had called purposely to inspect Edwin at leisure. "The Light of Asia" was a mere poetical pretext. "The Light of Asia" might as easily have been ordered at Hanbridge, where her father and brothers ordered all their books—in fact, more easily. Janet, with all her niceness, with all the reality of her immense good-nature, loved as well as anybody a bit of chicane where a man was concerned. Janet's eyes could twinkle as mischievously as her quiet mother's. Mr. Orgreave having in the last eight months been in professional relations with Darius and Edwin, the Orgreave household had been discussing Edwin again. Mr. Orgreave spoke of him favourably. Mrs. Orgreave said that he looked the right sort of youth, but that he had a peculiar manner. Janet said that she should not be surprised if there was something in him. Janet said also that his sister Clara was an impossible piece of goods, and that his sister Maggie was born an old maid. One of her brothers then said that that was just what was the matter with Edwin too ! Mr. Orgreave protested that he wasn't so sure of that, and that occasionally Edwin would say things that were really rather good. This stimulated Mrs. Orgreave's curiosity, and she suggested that her husband should invite the young man to their house. Whereupon Mr. Orgreave pessimistically admitted that he did not think Edwin could be enticed. And Janet, piqued, said, "If that's all, I'll have him here in a week." They were

an adventurous family, always ready for anything, always on the look-out for new sources of pleasure, full of zest in life. They liked novelties, and hospitality was their chief hobby. They made fun of nearly everybody, but it was not mean fun.

Such, and not "The Light of Asia," was the cause of Janet's visit.

III

Be it said to Edwin's shame that she would have got no further with the family plot that morning, had it not been for the chivalry of Stifford. Having allowed his eyes to rest on the lair, Stifford allowed his memory to forget the rule of the shop, and left the counter for the door of the lair, determined that Miss Orgreave should see the genuineness of his anxiety to do his utmost for so sympathetic a woman. Edwin, perceiving the intention from his lair, had to choose whether he would go out or be fetched out. Of course he preferred to go out. But he would never have gone out on his own initiative; he would have hesitated until Janet had departed, and he would then have called himself a fool. He regretted, and I too regret, that he was like that; but like that he was.

He emerged with nervous abruptness.

"Oh, how d'you do, Miss Orgreave?" he said; "I thought it was your voice." After this he gave a little laugh, which meant nothing, certainly not amusement; it was merely a gawky habit that he had unconsciously adopted. Then he took his handkerchief out of his pocket and put it back again. Stifford fell back and had to pretend that nothing interested him less than the interview which he had precipitated.

"How d'you do, Mr. Clayhanger?" said Janet.

They shook hands. Edwin wrung Janet's hand; another gawky habit.

"I was just going to order a book," said Janet.

"Oh yes! 'The Light of Asia,'" said Edwin.

"Have you read it?" Janet asked.

"Yes—that is, a lot of it."

"Have you?" exclaimed Janet. She was impressed, because really the perusal of verse was not customary in the town. And her delightful features showed generously the

full extent to which she was impressed : an honest, ungrudging appreciation of Edwin's studiousness. She said to herself : " Oh ! I must certainly get him to the house." And Edwin said to himself, " No mistake there's something very genuine about this girl."

Edwin said aloud quickly from an exaggerated apprehensiveness lest she should be rating him too high—

" It was quite an accident that I saw it. I never read that sort of thing—not as a rule." He laughed again.

" Is it worth buying ? " Now she appealed to him as an authority. She could not help doing so, and in doing so she was quite honest, for her good-nature had momentarily persuaded her that he was an authority.

" I—I don't know," Edwin answered, moving his neck as though his collar was not comfortable ; but it was comfortable, being at least a size too large. " It depends, you know. If you read a lot of poetry, it's worth buying. But if you don't, it isn't. It's not Tennyson, you know. See what I mean ? "

" Yes, quite ! " said Janet, smiling with continued and growing appreciation. The reply struck her as very sagacious. She suddenly saw in a new light her father's hints that there was something in this young man not visible to everybody. She had a tremendous respect for her father's opinion, and now she reproached herself in that she had not attached due importance to what he had said about Edwin. " How right father always is ! " she thought. Her attitude of respect for Edwin was now more securely based upon impartial intelligence than before ; it owed less to her weakness for seeing the best in people. As for Edwin, he was saying to himself : " I wish to the devil I could talk to her without spluttering ! Why can't I be natural ? Why can't I be glib ? Some chaps could." And Edwin could be, with some chaps.

IV

They were standing close together in the shop, Janet and Edwin, near the cabinet of artists' materials. Janet, after her manner at once frank and reassuring, examined Edwin ; she had come on purpose to examine him. She had never been able to decide whether or not he was good-looking, and she could not decide now. But she liked the appeal in his eyes.

She did not say to herself that there was an appeal in his eyes ; she said that there was ‘ something in his eyes.’ Also he was moderately tall, and he was slim. She said to herself that he must be very well shaped. Beginning at the bottom, his boots were clumsy, his trousers were baggy and even shiny, and they had transverse creases, not to be seen in the trousers of her own menkind ; his waistcoat showed plainly the forms of every article in the pockets thereof—watch, penknife, pencil, etc., it was obvious that he never emptied his pockets at night ; his collar was bluish-white instead of white, and its size was monstrous ; his jacket had ‘ worked up ’ at the back of his neck, completely hiding his collar there ; the side-pockets of his jacket were weighted and bulged with mysterious goods ; his fair hair was rough but not curly ; he had a moustache so trifling that one could not be sure whether it was a moustache or whether he had been too busy to think of shaving. Janet received all these facts into her brain, and then carelessly let them all slip out again, in her preoccupation with his eyes. She said they were sad eyes. The mouth, too, was somewhat sad (she thought), but there was a drawing down of the corners of it that seemed to make gentle fun of its sadness. Janet, perhaps out of her good-nature, liked his restless, awkward movements, and the gesture of his hands, of which the articulations were too prominent, and the finger-nails too short.

“ Tom reads rather a lot of poetry,” said Janet. “ That’s my eldest brother.”

“ That *might* justify you,” said Edwin doubtfully.

They both laughed. And as with Janet, so with Edwin, when he laughed, all the kindest and honestest part of him seemed to rise into his face.

“ But if you don’t supply new books any more ? ”

“ Oh ! ” Edwin stuttered, blushing slightly. “ That’s nothing. I shall be very pleased to get it for you specially, Miss Orgreave. It’s father that decided—only last month—that the new book business was more trouble than it’s worth. It was—in a way ; but I’m sorry, myself, we’ve given it up, poor as it was. Of course there *are* no book-buyers in this town, especially now old Lawton’s dead. But still, what with one thing or another, there was generally some book on order,

and I used to see them. Of course there's no money in it. But still . . . Father says that people buy less books than they used to—but he's wrong there." Edwin spoke with calm certainty. "I've shown him he's wrong by our order-book, but he wouldn't see it." Edwin smiled, with a general mild indulgence for fathers.

"Well," said Janet, "I'll ask Tom first."

"No trouble whatever to us to order it for you, I assure you. I can get it down by return of post."

"It's very good of you," said Janet, genuinely persuading herself for the moment that Edwin was quite exceeding the usual bounds of complaisance.

She moved to depart.

"Father told me to tell you if I saw you that the glazing will be all finished this morning," said she.

"Up yonder?" Edwin jerked his head to indicate the south.

And Janet delicately confirmed his assumption with a slight declension of her waving hat.

"Oh! Good!" Edwin murmured.

Janet held out her hand, to be wrung again, and assured him of her gratitude for his offer of taking trouble about the book; and he assured her that it would not be trouble but pleasure. He accompanied her to the doorway.

"I think I must come up and have a look at that glazing this afternoon," he said, as she stood on the pavement.

She nodded, smiling benevolence and appreciation, and departed round the corner in the soft sunshine.

Edwin put on a stern, casual expression for the benefit of Stifford, as who should say: "What a trial these frivolous girls are to a man immersed in affairs!" But Stifford was not deceived. Safe within his lair, Edwin was conscious of quite a disturbing glow. He smiled to himself—a little self-consciously, though alone. Then he scribbled down in pencil "'Light of Asia.' Miss J. Orgreave."

CHAPTER II

FATHER AND SON AFTER SEVEN YEARS

I

DARIUS came heavily, and breathing heavily, into the little office.

"Now as all this racketing's over," he said crossly—he meant by 'racketing' the general election which had just put the Liberal party into power—"I'll thank ye to see as all that red and blue ink is cleaned off the rollers and slabs, and the types cleaned too. I've told 'em ten times if I've told 'em once, but as far as I can make out, they've done naught to it yet."

Edwin grunted without looking up.

His father was now a fattish man, and he had aged quite as much as Edwin. Some of his scanty hair was white; the rest was grey. White hair sprouted about his ears; gold gleamed in his mouth; and a pair of spectacles hung insecurely balanced half way down his nose; his waistcoat seemed to be stretched tightly over a perfectly smooth hemisphere. He had an air of somewhat gross and prosperous untidiness. Except for the teeth, his bodily frame appeared to have fallen into disrepair, as though he had ceased to be interested in it, as though he had been using it for a long time as a mere makeshift lodging. And this impression was more marked at table; he ate exactly as if throwing food to a wild animal concealed somewhere within the hemisphere, an animal which was never seen, but which rumbled threateningly from time to time in its dark dungeon.

Of all this, Edwin had definitely noticed nothing save that his father was 'getting stouter.' To Edwin, Darius was exactly the same father, and for Darius, Edwin was still aged sixteen. They both of them went on living on the assumption that the world had stood still in those seven years between

1873 and 1880. If they had been asked what had happened during those seven years, they would have answered: "Oh, nothing particular!"

But the world had been whizzing ceaselessly from one miracle into another. Board schools had been opened in Bursley, wondrous affairs, with ventilation; indeed, ventilation had been discovered. A Jew had been made Master of the Rolls: spectacle at which England shivered, and then, perceiving no sign of disaster, shrugged its shoulders. Irish members had taught the House of Commons how to talk for twenty-four hours without a pause. The wages of the agricultural labourer had sprung into the air and leaped over the twelve-shilling bar into regions of opulence. Moody and Sankey had found and conquered England for Christ. Landseer and Livingstone had died, and the provinces could not decide whether "Dignity and Impudence" or the penetration of Africa was the more interesting feat. Herbert Spencer had published his "Study of Sociology"; Matthew Arnold his "Literature and Dogma"; and Frederic Farrar his Life of his Lord; but here the provinces had no difficulty in deciding, for they had only heard of the last. Every effort had been made to explain by persuasion and by force to the working man that trade unions were inimical to his true welfare, and none had succeeded, so stupid was he. The British Army had been employed to put reason into the noddle of a town called Northampton which was furious because an atheist had not been elected to Parliament. Pullman cars, "The Pirates of Penzance," Henry Irving's "Hamlet," spelling-bees, and Captain Webb's channel swim had all proved that there were novelties under the sun. Bishops, archbishops, and dissenting ministers had met at Lambeth to inspect the progress of irreligious thought, with intent to arrest it. Princes and dukes had conspired to inaugurate the most singular scheme that ever was, the Kyrle Society—for bringing beauty home to the people by means of decorative art, gardening, and music. The Bulgarian Atrocities had served to give new life to all penny gaffs and blood-tubs. The "Eurydice" and the "Princess Alice" had foundered in order to demonstrate the uncertainty of existence and the courage of the island-race. The "Nineteenth Century" had been started, a little late in the

day, and the "Referee." Ireland had all but died of hunger, but had happily been saved to enjoy the benefits of Coercion. The Young Men's Christian Association had been born again in the splendour of Exeter Hall. Bursley itself had entered on a new career as a chartered borough, with Mayor, aldermen, and councillors, all in chains of silver. And among the latest miracles were Northampton's success in sending the atheist to Parliament, the infidelity of the Tay Bridge three days after Christmas, the catastrophe of Majuba Hill, and the discovery that soldiers objected to being flogged into insensibility for a peccadillo.

But, in spite of numerous attempts, nobody had contrived to make England see that her very existence would not be threatened if museums were opened on Sunday, or that Nonconformists might be buried according to their own rites without endangering the Constitution.

I

Darius was possibly a little uneasy in his mind about the world. Possibly there had just now begun to form in his mind the conviction, in which most men die, that all was not quite well with the world, and that in particular his native country had contracted a fatal malady since he was a boy.

He was a printer, and yet the General Election had not put sunshine in his heart. And this was strange, for a general election is the brief millennium of printers, especially of steam-printers who for dispatch can beat all rivals. During a general election the question put by a customer to a printer is not "How much will it be?" but "How soon can I have it?" There was no time for haggling about price; and indeed to haggle about price would have been unworthy, seeing that every customer (ordinary business being at a standstill) was engaged in the salvation of England. Darius was a Liberal, but a quiet one, and he was patronized by both political parties—blue and red. As a fact, neither party could have done without him. His printing office had clattered and thundered early and late, and more than once had joined the end of one day's work to the beginning of another; and more than once had Big James with his men and his boy (a regiment increased since 1873) stood like plotters muttering in the

yard at five minutes to twelve on Sunday evening, waiting for midnight to sound, and Big James had unlocked the door of the office on the new-born Monday, and work had instantly commenced to continue till Monday was nearly dead of old age.

Once only had work been interrupted, and that was on a day when, a lot of 'blue jobs' being about, a squad of red fire-eaters had come up the back alley with intent to answer arguments by thwackings and wreckings; but the obstinacy of an oak door had fatigued them. The staff had enjoyed that episode. Every member of it was well paid for overtime. Darius could afford to pay conscientiously. In the printing trade, prices were steadier then than they are now. But already the discovery of competition was following upon the discovery of ventilation. Perhaps Darius sniffed it from a distance, and was disturbed thereby.

III

For though he was a Liberal in addition to being a printer, and he had voted Liberal, and his party had won, yet the General Election had not put sunshine in his heart. No! The tendencies of England worried him. When he read in a paper about the heretical tendencies of Robertson Smith's Biblical articles in the "Encyclopædia Britannica," he said to himself that they were of a piece with the rest, and that such things were to be expected in those modern days, and that matters must have come to a pretty pass when even the "Encyclopædia Britannica" was infected. (Still, he had sold a copy of the new edition.) He was exceedingly bitter against Ireland; and also, in secret, behind Big James's back, against trade unions. When Edwin came home one night and announced that he had joined the Bursley Liberal Club, Darius lost his temper. Yet he was a member of the club himself. He gave no reason for his fury, except that it was foolish for a tradesman to mix himself up with politics. Edwin, however, had developed a sudden interest in politics, and had made certain promises of clerical aid, which promises he kept, saying nothing more to his father. Darius's hero was Sir Robert Peel, simply because Sir Robert Peel had done away with the Corn Laws. Darius had known England before

and after the repeal of the Corn Laws, and the difference between the two Englands was so strikingly dramatic to him that he desired no further change. He had only one date—1846. His cup had been filled then. Never would he forget the scenes of anguishing joy that occurred at midnight of the day before the new Act became operative. From that moment he had finished with progress. . . . If Edwin could only have seen those memories, shining in layers deep in his father's heart, and hidden now by all sorts of Pliocene deposits, he would have understood his father better. But Edwin did not see into his father's heart at all, nor even into his head. When he looked at his father he saw nothing but an ugly, stertorous old man (old, that is, to Edwin), with a peculiar and incalculable way of regarding things and a temper of growing capriciousness.

IV

Darius was breathing and fidgeting all over him as he sat bent at the desk. His presence overwhelmed every other physical phenomenon.

"What's this?" asked Darius, picking up the bit of paper on which Edwin had written the memorandum about "The Light of Asia."

Edwin explained, self-consciously, lamely.

When the barometer of Darius's temper was falling rapidly, there was a sign: a small spot midway on the bridge of his nose turned ivory-white. Edwin glanced upwards now to see if the sign was there, and it was. He flushed slightly and resumed his work.

Then Darius began.

"What did I tell ye?" he shouted. "What in the name of God's the use o' me telling ye things? Have I told ye not to take any more orders for books, or haven't I? Haven't I said over and over again that I want this shop to be known for wholesale?" He raved.

V

Stifford could hear. Any person who might chance to come into the shop would hear. But Darius cared neither for his own dignity nor for that of his son. He was in a passion.

The real truth was that this celibate man, who never took alcohol, enjoyed losing his temper ; it was his one outlet ; he gave himself up almost luxuriously to a passion ; he looked forward to it as some men look forward to brandy. And Edwin had never stopped him by some drastic step. At first, years before, Edwin had said to himself, trembling with resentment in his bedroom, " The next time, the very next time, he humiliates me like that in front of other people, I'll walk out of his damned house and shop, and I swear I won't come back until he's apologized. I'll bring him to his senses. He can't do without me. Once for all I'll stop it. What ! He forces me into his business, and then insults me ! "

But Edwin had never done it. Always, it was ' the very next time ' ! Edwin was not capable of doing it. His father had a sort of moral brute-force, against which he could not stand firm. He soon recognized this, with his intellectual candour. Then he had tried to argue with Darius, to ' make him see ' ! Worse than futile ! Argument simply put Darius beside himself. So that in the end Edwin employed silence and secret scorn, as a weapon and as a defence. And somehow without a word he conveyed to Stifford and to Big James precisely what his attitude in these crises was, so that he retained their respect and avoided their pity. The outbursts still wounded him, but he was wonderfully inured.

As he sat writing under the onslaught, he said to himself, " By God ! If ever I get the chance, I'll pay you out for this some day ! " And he meant it. A peep into his mind, then, would have startled Janet Orgreave, Mrs. Nixon, and other persons who had a cult for the wistfulness of his appealing eyes.

He steadily maintained silence, and the conflagration burnt itself out.

" Are you going to look after the printing shop, or aren't you ? " Darius growled at length.

Edwin rose and went. As he passed through the shop, Stifford, who had in him the raw material of fine manners, glanced down, but not too ostentatiously, at a drawer under the counter.

The printing office was more crowded than ever with men

and matter. Some of the composing was now done on the ground-floor. The whole organism functioned, but under such difficulties as could not be allowed to continue, even by Darius Clayhanger. Darius had finally recognized that.

"Oh!" said Edwin, in a tone of confidential intimacy to Big James, "I see they're getting on with the cleaning! Good. Father's beginning to get impatient, you know. It's the bigger cases that had better be done first."

"Right it is, Mr. Edwin!" said Big James. The giant was unchanged. No sign of grey in his hair; and his cheek was smooth, apparently his philosophy put him beyond the touch of time.

"I say, Mr. Edwin," he inquired in his majestic voice. "When are we going to rearrange all this?" He gazed around.

Edwin laughed. "Soon," he said.

"Won't be too soon," said Big James.

CHAPTER III

THE NEW HOUSE

I

A HOUSE stood on a hill. And that hill was Bleakridge, the summit of the little billow of land between Bursley and Hanbridge. Trafalgar Road passed over the crest of the billow. Bleakridge was certainly not more than a hundred feet higher than Bursley; yet people were now talking a lot about the advantages of living 'up' at Bleakridge, 'above' the smoke, and 'out' of the town, though it was not more than five minutes from the Duck Bank. To hear them talking, one might have fancied that Bleakridge was away in the mountains somewhere. The new steam-cars would pull you up there in three minutes or so, every quarter of an hour. It was really the new steam-cars that were to be the making of Bleakridge as a residential suburb. It had also been predicted that even Hanbridge men would come to live at Bleakridge now. Land was changing owners at Bleakridge, and rising in price. Complete streets of lobbied cottages grew at angles from the main road with the rapidity of that plant which pushes out strangling branches more quickly than a man can run. And these lobbied cottages were at once occupied. Cottage-property in the centre of the town depreciated.

The land fronting the main road was destined not for cottages, but for residences, semi-detached—or detached. Osmond Orgreave had a good deal of this land under his control. He did not own it, he hawked it. Like all provincial, and most London, architects, he was a land-broker in addition to being an architect. Before obtaining a commission to build a house, he frequently had to create the commission himself by selling a convenient plot, and then persuading the purchaser that if he wished to retain the

respect of the community he must put on the plot a house worthy of the plot. The Orgreave family all had expensive tastes, and it was Osmond Orgreave's task to find most of the money needed for the satisfaction of those tastes. He always did find it, because the necessity was upon him, but he did not always find it easily. Janet would say sometimes, "We mustn't be so hard on father this month ; really, lately we've never seen him with his cheque-book out of his hand." Undoubtedly the clothes on Janet's back were partly responsible for the celerity with which building land at Bleakridge was 'developed,' just after the installation of steam-cars in in Trafalgar Road.

II

Mr. Orgreave sold a corner plot to Darius. He had had his eye on Darius for a long time before he actually shot him down ; but difficulties connected with the paring of estimates for printing had somewhat estranged them. Orgreave had had to smooth out these difficulties, offer to provide a portion of the purchase money on mortgage from another client, produce a plan for a new house that surpassed all records of cheapness, produce a plan for the transforming of Darius's present residence into business premises, talk poetically about the future of printing in the Five Towns, and lastly, demonstrate by digits that Darius would actually save money by becoming a property-owner—he had had to do all this, and more, before Darius would buy.

The two were regular cronies for about a couple of months—that is to say, between the payment of the preliminary deposit and the signing of the contract for building the house. But, the contract signed, their relations were once more troubled. Orgreave had nothing to fear, then, and besides, he was using his diplomacy elsewhere. The house went up to an accompaniment of scenes in which only the proprietor was irate. Osmond Orgreave could not be ruffled ; he could not be deprived of his air of having done a favour to Darius Clayhanger ; his social and moral superiority, his real aloofness, remained absolutely unimpaired. The clear image of him as a fine gentleman was never dulled nor distorted even in the mind of Darius. Nevertheless Darius 'hated the sight' of

the house ere the house was roofed in. But this did not diminish his pride in the house. He wished he had never 'set eyes on' Osmond Orgreave. Yes! But the little boy from the Bastille was immensely content at the consequences of having set eyes on Osmond Orgreave. The little boy from the Bastille was achieving the supreme peak of greatness—he was about to live away from business. Soon he would be 'going down to business' of a morning. Soon he would be receiving two separate demand-notes for rates. Soon he would be on a plane with the vainest earthenware manufacturer of them all. Ages ago he had got as far as a house with a lobby to it. Now, it would be a matter of two establishments. Beneath all his discontents, moodiness, temper, and biliousness, lay this profound satisfaction of the little boy from the Bastille.

Moreover, in any case, he would have been obliged to do something heroic, if only to find the room more and more imperiously demanded by his printing business.

III

On the Saturday afternoon of Janet Orgreave's visit to the shop, Edwin went up to Bleakridge to inspect the house, and in particular the coloured 'lights' in the upper squares of the drawing-room and dining-room windows. He had a key to the unpainted front door, and having climbed over various obstacles and ascended an inclined bending plank, he entered and stood in the square hall of the deserted, damp, and inchoate structure.

The house was his father's only in name. In emotional fact it was Edwin's house, because he alone was capable of possessing it by enjoying it. To Darius, to Bursley in general, it was just a nice house, of red brick with terra-cotta facings and red tiles, in the second-Victorian Style, the style that had broken away from Georgian austerity and first-Victorian stucco and smugness, and wandered off vaguely into nothing in particular. To the plebeian in Darius it was of course grandiose, and vast; to Edwin also, in a less degree. But to Edwin it was not a house, it was a work of art, it was an epic poem, it was an emanation of the soul. He did not realize this. He did not realize how the house had informed

his daily existence. All that he knew about himself in relation to the house was that he could not keep away from it. He 'went and had a look at it' nearly every morning before breakfast, when the workmen were fresh and lyrical.

When the news came down to the younger generation that Darius had bought land and meant to build on the land, Edwin had been profoundly moved between apprehension and hope; his condition had been one of simple but intense expectant excitement. He wondered what his own status would be in the great enterprise of house-building. All depended on Mr. Orgreave. Would Mr. Orgreave, of whom he had seen scarcely anything in seven years, remember that he was intelligently interested in architecture? Or would Mr. Orgreave walk right over him and talk exclusively to his father? He had feared, he had had a suspicion, that Mr. Orgreave was an inconstant man.

Mr. Orgreave had remembered in the handsomest way. When the plans were being discussed, Mr. Orgreave with one word, a tone, a glance, had raised Edwin to the consultative level of his father. He had let Darius see that Edwin was in his opinion worthy to take part in discussions, and quite privately he had let Edwin see that Darius must not be treated too seriously. Darius, who really had no interest in ten thousand exquisitely absorbing details, had sometimes even said, with impatience, "Oh! Settle it how you like, with Edwin."

Edwin's own suggestions never seemed very brilliant, and Mr. Orgreave was always able to prove to him that they were inadvisable; but they were never silly, like most of his father's. And he acquired leading ideas that transformed his whole attitude towards architecture. For example, he had always looked on a house as a front-wall diversified by doors and windows, with rooms behind it. But when Mr. Orgreave produced his first notions for the new house Edwin was surprised to find that he had not even sketched the front. He had said, "We shall be able to see what the elevation looks like when we've decided the plan a bit." And Edwin saw in a flash that the front of a house was merely the expression of the inside of it, merely a result, almost accidental. And he was astounded and disgusted that he, with his professed love of

architecture and his intermittent study of it, had not perceived this obvious truth for himself. He never again looked at a house in the old irrational way.

Then, when examining the preliminary sketch-plan, he had put his finger on a square space and asked what room that was. "That isn't a room; that's the hall," said Mr. Orgreave. "But it's square!" Edwin exclaimed. He thought that in houses (houses to be lived in) the hall or lobby must necessarily be long and narrow. Now suddenly he saw no reason why a hall should not be square. Mr. Orgreave had made no further remark about halls at the time, but another day, without any preface, he reopened the subject to Edwin, in a tone good-naturedly informing, and when he had done Edwin could see that the shape of the hall depended on the shape of the house, and that halls had only been crushed and pulled into something long and narrow because the disposition of houses absolutely demanded this ugly negation of the very idea of a hall. Again, he had to begin to think afresh, to see afresh. He conceived a real admiration for Osmond Orgreave; not more for his original and yet common-sense manner of regarding things, than for his aristocratic deportment, his equality to every situation, and his extraordinary skill in keeping his dignity and his distance during encounters with Darius. (At the same time, when Darius would grumble savagely that Osmond Orgreave 'was too clever by half,' Edwin could not deny that.) Edwin's sisters got a good deal of Mr. Orgreave, through Edwin; he could never keep Mr. Orgreave very long to himself. He gave away a great deal of Mr. Orgreave's wisdom without mentioning the origin of the gift. Thus occasionally Clara would say cuttingly, "I know where you've picked that up. You've picked that up from Mr. Orgreave." The young man Benbow to whom the infant Clara had been so queerly engaged, also received from Edwin considerable quantities of Mr. Orgreave. But the fellow was only a decent, dull, pushing, successful ass, and quite unable to assimilate Mr. Orgreave; Edwin could never comprehend how Clara, so extremely difficult to please, so carping and captious, could mate herself to a fellow like Benbow. She had done so, however; they were recently married. Edwin was glad that that was over; for it had disturbed him in his attentions to the house.

IV

When the house began to 'go up,' Edwin lived in an ecstasy of contemplation. I say with deliberateness an 'ecstasy.' He had seen houses go up before; he knew that houses were constructed brick by brick, beam by beam, lath by lath, tile by tile; he knew that they did not build themselves. And yet, in the vagueness of his mind, he had never imaginatively realized that a house was made with hands, and hands that could err. With its exact perpendiculars and horizontals, its geometric regularities, and its Chinese preciseness of fitting, a house had always seemed to him—again in the vagueness of his mind—as something superhuman. The commonest cornice, the most ordinary pillar of a staircase-balustrade—could that have been accomplished in its awful perfection of line and contour by a human being? How easy to believe that it was 'not made with hands'!

But now he saw. He had to see. He saw a hole in the ground, with water at the bottom, and the next moment that hole was a cellar; not an amateur cellar, a hole that would do at a pinch for a cellar, but a professional cellar. He appreciated the brains necessary to put a brick on another brick, with just the right quantity of mortar in between. He thought the house would never get itself done—one brick at a time—and each brick cost a farthing—slow, careful; yes, and even finicking. But soon the bricklayers had to stand on platforms in order to reach the raw top of the wall that was ever rising above them. The measurements, the rulings, the plumbings, the checkings! He was humbled and he was enlightened. He understood that a miracle is only the result of miraculous patience, miraculous nicety, miraculous honesty, miraculous perseverance. He understood that there was no golden and magic secret of building. It was just putting one brick on another and against another—but to a hair's breadth. It was just like anything else. For instance, printing! He saw even printing in a new light.

And when the first beams were bridged across two walls. . . .

The funny thing was that the men's fingers were thick and clumsy. Never could such fingers pick up a pin! And still

they would manœuvre a hundredweight of timber to a pin's point.

V

He stood at the drawing-room bay-window (of which each large pane had been marked with the mystic sign of a white circle by triumphant glaziers) and looked across the enclosed fragment of clayey field that ultimately would be the garden. The house was at the corner of Trafalgar Road and a side-street that had lobbied cottages down its slope. The garden was oblong, with its length parallel to Trafalgar Road, and separated from the pavement only by a high wall. The upper end of the garden was blocked by the first of three new houses which Osmond Orgreave was building in a terrace. These houses had their main fronts on the street; they were quite as commodious as the Clayhangers', but much inferior in garden-space; their bits of flower-plots lay behind them. And away behind their flower-plots, with double entrance-gates in another side-street, stretched the grounds of Osmond Orgreave, his house in the sheltered middle thereof. He had got, cheaply, one of the older residential properties of the district, Georgian, of a recognizable style, relic of the days when manufacturers formed a class entirely apart from their operatives; even as far back as 1880 any operative might with luck become an employer. The south-east corner of the Clayhanger garden touched the north-west corner of the domains of Orgreave; for a few feet the two gardens were actually contiguous, with naught but an old untidy thorn hedge between them; this hedge was to be replaced by a wall that would match the topmost of the lobbied cottages which bounded the view of the Clayhangers to the east.

From the bay-window Edwin could see over the hedge, and also through it, on to the croquet lawn of the Orgreaves. Croquet was then in its first avatar; nothing was more dashing than croquet. With rag-balls and home-made mallets the Clayhanger children had imitated croquet in their yard in the seventies. The Orgreaves played real croquet; one of them had shone in a tournament at Buxton. Edwin noticed a figure on the gravel between the lawn and the hedge. He knew it to be Janet, by the crimson frock. But he had no

notion that Janet had stationed herself in that quarter with intent to waylay him. He could not have credited her with such a purpose. Nor could his modesty have believed that he was important enough to employ the talent of the Orgreaves for agreeable chicane. The fact was that Janet had been espying him for a quarter of an hour. When at length she waved her hand to him it did not occur to him to suppose that she was waving her hand to him ; he merely wondered what peculiar thing she was doing. Then he blushed as she waved again, and he knew first from the blood in his face that Janet was making a signal, and that it was to himself that the signal was directed : his body had told his mind ; this was very odd.

Of course he was obliged to go out ; and he went, muttering to himself.

CHAPTER IV

THE TWO GARDENS

I

IN the full beauty of the afternoon they stood together, only the scraggy hedge between them, he on grass-tufted clay, and she on orderly gravel.

"Well," said Janet, earnestly looking at him, "how do you like the effect of that window, now it's done?"

"Very nice!" he laughed nervously. "Very nice indeed!"

"Father said it was," she remarked. "I do hope Mr. Clayhanger will like it too!" And her voice really was charged with sympathetic hope. It was as if she would be saddened and cast down if Darius did not approve the window. It was as if she fervently wished that Darius should not be disappointed with the window. The unskilled spectator might have assumed that anxiety for the success of the window would endanger her sleep at nights. She was perfectly sincere. Her power of emotional sympathy was all-embracing and inexhaustible. If she heard that an acquaintance of one of her acquaintances had lost a relative or broken a limb, she would express genuine deep concern, with a tremor of her honest and kindly voice. And if she heard the next moment that an acquaintance of one of her acquaintances had come into five thousand pounds or affianced himself to a sister-spirit, her eyes would sparkle with heartfelt joy and her hands clasp each other in sheer delight.

"Oh!" said Edwin, touched. "It'll be all right for the dad. No fear!"

"I haven't seen it yet," she proceeded. "In fact I haven't been in your house for such a long time. But I do think it's going to be very nice. All father's houses are so nice, aren't they?"

"Yes," said Edwin, with that sideways shake of the head

that in the vocabulary of his gesture signified, not dissent, but emphatic assent. "You ought to come and have a look at it." He could not say less.

"Do you think I could scramble through here?" she indicated the sparse hedge.

"I—I——"

"I know what I'll do. I'll get the steps." She walked off sedately, and came back with a small pair of steps, which she opened out on the narrow flower-bed under the hedge. Then she picked up her skirt and delicately ascended the rocking ladder till her feet were on a level with the top of the hedge. She smiled charmingly, savouring the harmless escapade, and gazing at Edwin. She put out her free hand, Edwin took it, and she jumped. The steps fell backwards, but she was safe.

"What a good thing mother didn't see me!" she laughed. Her grave, sympathetic, almost handsome face was now alive everywhere with a sort of challenging merriment. She was only pretending that it was a good thing her mother had not seen her: a delicious make-believe. Why, she was as motherly as her mother! In an instant her feet were choosing their way and carrying her with grace and stateliness across the mire of the unformed garden. She was the woman of the world, and Edwin the raw boy. The harmony and dignity of her movements charmed and intimidated Edwin. Compare her to Maggie. . . . That she was hatless added piquancy.

II

They went into the echoing bare house, crunching gravel and dry clay on the dirty, new floors. They were alone together in the house. And all the time Edwin was thinking: "I've never been through anything like this before. Never been through anything like this!" And he recalled for a second the figure of Florence Simcox, the clog-dancer.

And below these images and reflections in his mind was the thought: "I haven't known what life *is*! I've been asleep. This is life!"

The upper squares of the drawing-room window were filled with small leaded diamond-shaped panes of many colours. It

was the latest fashion in domestic glazing. The effect was at once rich and gorgeous. She liked it.

"It will be beautiful on this side in the late afternoon," she murmured. "What a nice room!"

Their eyes met, and she transmitted to him her joy in his joy at the admirableness of the house.

He nodded. "By Jove!" he thought. "She's a splendid girl. There can't be many girls knocking about as fine as she is!"

"And when the garden's full of flowers---!" she breathed in rapture. She was thinking, "Strange, nice boy! He's so romantic. All he wants is bringing out."

They wandered to and fro. They went upstairs. They saw the bathroom. They stood on the landing, and the unseen spaces of the house were busy with their echoes. They then entered the room that was to be Edwin's.

"Mine!" he said self-consciously.

"And I see you're having shelves fixed on both sides of the mantelpiece! You're very fond of books, aren't you?" she appealed to him.

"Yes," he said judiciously.

"Aren't they wonderful things?" Her glowing eyes seemed to be expressing gratitude to Shakespeare and all his successors in the dynasty of literature.

"That shelving is between your father and me," said Edwin. "The dad doesn't know. It'll go in with the house-fittings. I don't expect the dad will ever notice it."

"Really!" She laughed, eager to join the innocent conspiracy. "Father invented an excellent dodge for shelving in the hall at our house," she added. "I'm sure he'd like you to come and see it. The dear thing's most absurdly proud of it."

"I should like to," Edwin answered diffidently.

"Would you come in some evening and see us? Mother would be delighted. We all should."

"Very kind of you." In his diffidence he was now standing on one leg.

"Could you come to-night? . . . Or to-morrow night?"

"I'm afraid I couldn't come to-night, *or* to-morrow night," he answered with firmness. A statement entirely untrue!

He had no engagement ; he never did have an engagement. But he was frightened, and his spirit sprang away from the idea, like a fawn at a sudden noise in the brake, and stood still.

He did not suspect that the unconscious gruffness of his tone had repulsed her. She blamed herself for a too brusque advance.

" Well, I hope some other time," she said, mild and benignant.

" Thanks ! I'd like to," he replied more boldly, reassured now that he had heard again the same noise but indefinitely farther off.

She departed, but by the front door, and hatless and dignified up Trafalgar Road in the delicate sunshine to the next turning. She was less vivacious.

He hoped he had not offended her, because he wanted very much—not to go in cold blood to the famed mansion of the Orgreaves—but by some magic to find himself within it one night, at his ease, sharing in brilliant conversation. " Oh no ! " he said to himself. " She's not offended. A fine girl like that isn't offended for nothing at all ! " He had been invited to visit the Orgreaves ! He wondered what his father would say, or think. The unexpressed basic idea of the Clayhangers was that the Clayhangers were as good as other folks, be they *who* they might. Still, the Orgreaves were the Orgreaves. . . . In sheer absence of mind he remounted the muddy stairs.

III

He regarded the shabbiness of his clothes ; he had been preoccupied by their defects for about a quarter of an hour ; now he examined them in detail, and said to himself, disgusted, that really it was ridiculous for a man about to occupy a house like that to be wearing garments like those. Could he call on the Orgreaves in garments like those ? His Sunday suit was not, he felt, in fact much better. It was newer, less tumbled, but scarcely better. His suits did not cost enough. Finance was at the root of the crying scandal of his career as a dandy. The financial question must be reopened and settled anew. He should attack his father. His father was

extremely dependent on him now, and must be brought to see reason. (His father who had never seen reason !) But the attack must not be made with the weapon of clothes, for on that subject Darius was utterly unapproachable. Whenever Darius found himself in a conversation about clothes, he gave forth the antique and well-tryed witticism that as for him he didn't mind what he wore, because if he was at home everybody knew him and it didn't matter, and if he was away from home nobody knew him and it didn't matter. And he always repeated the saying with gusto, as if it was brand-new and none could possibly have heard it before.

No, Edwin decided that he would have to found his attack on the principle of abstract justice ; he would never be able to persuade his father that he lacked any detail truly needful to his happiness. To go into details would be to invite defeat.

Of course it would be a bad season in which to raise the financial question. His father would talk savagely in reply about the enormous expenses of house-building, house-furnishing, and removing,—and architects' and lawyers' fees ; he would be sure to mention the rapacity of architects and lawyers. Nevertheless Edwin felt that at just this season, and no other, must the attack be offered.

Because the inauguration of the new house was to be for Edwin, in a very deep and spiritual sense, the beginning of the new life ! He had settled that. The new house inspired him. It was not paradise. But it was a temple.

You of the younger generation cannot understand that—without imaginātion. I say that the hot-water system of the new house, simple and primitive as it was, affected and inspired Edwin like a poem. There was a cistern-room, actually a room devoted to nothing but cisterns, and the main cistern was so big that the builders had had to install it before the roof was put on, for it would never have gone through a door. This cistern, by means of a ball-tap, filled itself from the main nearly as quickly as it was emptied. Out of it grew pipes, creeping in secret downwards between inner walls of the house, penetrating everywhere. One went down to a boiler behind the kitchen-range and filled it, and as the fire that was roasting the joint heated the boiler, the water mounted again magically

to the cistern-room and filled another cistern, spherical and sealed, and thence descended, on a third journeying, to the bath and to the lavatory basin in the bathroom. All this was marvellous to Edwin; it was romantic. What! A room solely for baths! And a huge painted zinc bath! Edwin had never seen such a thing. And a vast porcelain basin, with tiles all round it, in which you could splash! An endless supply of water on the first-floor!

At the shop-house, every drop of water on the first-floor had to be carried upstairs in jugs and buckets; and every drop of it had to be carried down again. No hot water could be obtained until it had been boiled in a vessel on the fire. Hot water had the value of champagne. To take a warm hip-bath was an immense enterprise of heating, fetching, decanting, and general derangement of the entire house; and at best the bath was not hot; it always lost its virtue on the stairs and landing. And to splash—one of the most voluptuous pleasures in life—was forbidden by the code. Mrs. Nixon would actually weep at a splashing. Splashing was immoral. It was as wicked as amorous dalliance in a monastery. In the shop-house godliness was child's play compared to cleanliness.

And the shop-house was so dark! Edwin had never noticed how dark it was until the new house approached completion. The new house was radiant with light. It had always, for Edwin, the somewhat blinding brilliance which filled the sitting-room of the shop-house only when Duck Bank happened to be covered with fresh snow. And there was a dining-room, solely for eating, and a drawing-room. Both these names seemed 'grand' to Edwin, who had never sat in any but a sitting-room. Edwin had never dined; he had merely had dinner. And, having dined, to walk ceremoniously into another room . . .! (Odd! After all, his father was a man of tremendous initiative.) Would he and Maggie be able to do the thing naturally? Then there was the square hall—positively a room! That alone impelled him to a new life. When he thought of it all, the reception-rooms, the scientific kitchen, the vast scullery, the four large bedrooms, the bathroom, the three attics, the cistern-room murmurous with water, and the water tirelessly, in-

exhaustibly coursing up and down behind walls—he thrilled to fine impulses.

He took courage. He braced himself. The seriousness which he had felt on the day of leaving school revisited him. He looked back across the seven years of his life in the world, and condemned them unsparingly. He blamed no one but Edwin. He had forgiven his father for having thwarted his supreme ambition; long ago he had forgiven his father; though, curiously, he had never quite forgiven Mrs. Hamps for her share in the catastrophe. He honestly thought he had recovered from the catastrophe undisfigured, even unmarked. He knew not that he would never be the same man again, and that his lightest gesture and his lightest glance were touched with the wistfulness of resignation. He had frankly accepted the fate of a printer. And in business he was convinced, despite his father's capricious complaints, that he had acquitted himself well. In all the details of the business he considered himself superior to his father. And Big James would invariably act on his secret instructions given afterwards to counteract some misguided hasty order of the old man's.

It was the emptiness of the record of his private life that he condemned. What had he done for himself? Nothing large! Nothing heroic and imposing! He had meant to pursue certain definite courses of study, to become the possessor of certain definite groups of books, to continue his drawing and painting, to practise this, that and the other, to map out all his spare time, to make rules and to keep them,—all to the great end of self-perfecting. He had said: "What does it matter whether I am an architect or a printer, so long as I improve myself to the best of my powers?" He hated young men who talked about improving themselves. He spurned the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society (which had succeeded the Debating Society—defunct through over-indulgence in early rising). Nevertheless in his heart he was far more enamoured of the idea of improvement than the worst prig of them all. He could never for long escape from the dominance of the idea. He might violently push it away, arguing that it could lead to nothing and was futile and tedious; back it would come! It had always worried him.

And yet he had accomplished nothing. His systems of reading never worked for more than a month at a time. And for several months at a time he simply squandered his spare hours, the hours that were his very own, in a sort of coma of crass stupidity, in which he seemed to be thinking of nothing whatever. He had not made any friends whom he could esteem. He had not won any sort of notice. He was remarkable for nothing. He was not happy. He was not content. He had the consciousness of being a spendthrift of time and of years. . . . A fair quantity of miscellaneous reading—that was all he had done. He was not a student. He knew nothing about anything. He had stood still.

Thus he upbraided himself. And against this futility was his courage now braced by the inspiration of the new house, and tightened to a smarting tension by the brief interview with Janet Orgreave. He was going to do several feats at once : tackle his father, develop into a right expert on *some* subject, pursue his painting, and—for the moment this had the chief importance—‘come out of his shell.’ He meant to be social, to impress himself on others, to move about, to form connections, to be Edwin Clayhanger, an individuality in the town,—to live. Why had he refused Janet’s invitation? Mere silliness. The old self nauseated the new. But the next instant he sought excuses for the old self. . . . Wait a bit! There was time yet.

He was happy in the stress of one immense and complex resolve.

CHAPTER V

CLOTHES

I

HE heard voices below. And his soul seemed to shrink back, as if into the recesses of the shell from which it had been peeping. His soul was tremendous, in solitude; but even the rumour of society intimidated it. His father and another were walking about the ground-floor; the rough voice of his father echoed upwards in all its crudity. He listened for the other voice; it was his Auntie Clara's. Darius, too, had taken his Saturday afternoon for a leisurely visit to the house, and somehow he must have encountered Mrs. Hamps, and brought her with him to view.

Without giving himself time to dissipate his courage in reflection, he walked to the landing, and called down the stairs, "Hello, Auntie!"

Why should his tone have been self-conscious, forced? He was engaged in no crime. He had told his father where he was going, and his father had not contradicted his remark that even if both of them happened to be out together, the shop would take no harm under the sole care of Stifford for an hour in the quiet of Saturday afternoon.

Mrs. Hamps replied, in her coaxing, sweet manner.

"What did ye leave th' front door open for?" his father demanded curtly, and every room in the house heard the question.

"Was it open?" he said lamely.

"Was it open! All Trafalgar Road could have walked in and made themselves at home."

Edwin stood leaning with his arms on the rail of the landing. Presently the visitors appeared at the foot of the stairs, and Darius climbed carefully, having first shaken the balustrade to make sure that it was genuine, stout, and well-founded. Mrs.

Hamps followed, the fripperies of her elegant bonnet trembling, and her black gown rustling. Edwin smiled at her, and she returned his smile with usurious interest. There was now a mist of grey in her fine hair.

"Oh, Edwin!" she began, breathing relief on the top stair. "What a beautiful house! Beautiful! Quite perfect! The latest of everything! Do you know what I've been thinking while your dear father has been showing me all this—— So that's the bathroom! Bless us! Hot! Cold! Waste! That cupboard under the lavatory is very handy, but what a snare for a careless servant! Maggie will have to look at it every day, or it'll be used for anything and everything. You tell her what her auntie says. . . . I was thinking—if but your mother could have seen it all!"

Father and son said nothing. Auntie Hamps sighed. She was the only person who ever referred to the late Mrs. Clayhanger.

The procession moved on from room to room, Darius fingering and grunting, Mrs. Hamps discovering in each detail the fine flower of utter perfection, and Edwin strolling loosely in the wake of her curls, her mantle, and her abundant black petticoats. He could detect the odour of her kid gloves; it was a peculiar odour that never escaped him, and it reminded him inevitably of his mother's funeral.

He was glad that they had not arrived during the visit of Janet Orgreave.

In due course Edwin's bedroom was reached, and here Auntie Clara's ecstasy was redoubled.

"I'm sure you're very grateful to your father, aren't you, Edwin?" she majestically assumed, when she had admired passionately the window, the door, the pattern of the hearth-tiles, and the spaciousness.

Edwin could not speak. Inquiries of this nature from Mrs. Hamps paralysed the tongues of the children. They left nothing to be said. A sheepish grin, preceded by an inward mute curse, was all that Edwin could accomplish. How in heaven's name could the woman talk in that strain? His attitude towards his auntie was assuredly hardening with years.

"What's all this?" questioned his father suddenly, point-

ing to upright boards that had been fastened to the walls on either side of the mantelpiece, to a height of about three feet.

Then Edwin perceived the clumsiness of his tactics in remaining upstairs. He ought to have gone downstairs to meet his father and auntie, and left them to go up alone. His father was in an inquisitive mood.

"It's for shelves," he said.

"Shelves?"

"For my books. It's Mr. Orgreave's idea. He says it'll cost less."

"Cost less! Mr. Orgreave's got too many ideas—that's what's the matter with him. He'll idea me into the bankruptcy court if he keeps on."

Edwin would have liked to protest against the savagery of the tone, to inquire firmly why, since shelves were necessary for books and he had books, there need be such a display of ill-temper about a few feet of deal plank. The words were ready, the sentences framed in his mind. But he was silent. The door was locked on these words, but it was not Edwin who had turned the key; it was some force within him, over which he had no control.

II

"Now, now, father!" intervened Mrs. Hamps. "You know you've said over and over again how glad you are he's so fond of books, and never goes out. There isn't a better boy in Bursley. That I will say, and to his face." She smiled like an angel at both of them.

"You say! You say!" Darius remarked curtly, trying to control himself. A few years ago he would never have used such violent demeanour in her presence.

"And how much easier these shelves will be to keep clean than a bookcase! No polishing. Just a rub, and a wipe with a damp cloth now and then. And no dirt underneath. They will do away with four corners, anyhow. That's what I think of—eh, poor Maggie! Keeping all this clean. There'll be work for two women night and day, early and late, and even then—— But it's a great blessing to have water on every floor, that it is! And people aren't so particular nowa-

days as they used to be, I fancy. I fancy that more and more." Mrs. Hamps sighed, cheerfully bearing up.

Without a pause she stepped quickly across to Edwin. He wondered what she was at. She merely straightened down the collar of his coat, which unknown to him had treacherously allowed itself to remain turned up behind. It had probably been thus misbehaving itself since before dinner, when he had washed.

"Now, I do like my nephew to be tidy," said Mrs. Hamps affectionately. "I'm very jealous for my nephew." She caressed the shoulders of the coat, and Edwin had to stand still and submit. "Let me see, it's your birthday next month, isn't it?"

"Yes, auntie."

"Well, I know he hasn't got a lot of money. And I know his father hasn't any money to spare just now—what with all these expenses—the house——"

"Ye may well say it, sister!" Darius growled.

"I saw you the day before yesterday. My nephew didn't see me, but his auntie saw him. Oh, never mind where. And I said to myself, 'I should like my only nephew to have a suit a little better than that when he goes up and down on his father's business. What a change it would be if his old auntie gave him a new suit for a birthday present this year!'"

"Oh, auntie."

She spoke in a lower voice. "You come and see me to-morrow, and I shall have a little piece of paper in an envelope waiting for you. And you must choose something really good. You've got excellent taste, we all know that. And this will be a new start for you. A new year, and a new start, and we shall see how neat and spruce you'll keep yourself in future, eh?"

III

It was insufferable. But it was fine. Who could deny that Auntie Clara was not an extraordinary, an original, and a generous woman? What a masterly proof to both father and son! Perhaps not delicately administered. Yet Auntie Clara had lavished all the delicacy of her nature on the administering!

To Edwin, it seemed like an act of God in his favour. It seemed to set a divine seal on his resolutions. It was the most astonishing and apposite piece of luck that had ever happened to him. When he had lamely thanked the benefactor, he slipped away as soon as he could. Already he could feel the crinkling of the five-pound note in his hand. Five pounds ! He had never had a suit that cost more than fifty shillings. He slipped away. A great resolve was upon him. Shillitoe closed at four o'clock on Saturday afternoons. There was just time. He hurried down Trafalgar Road in a dream. And when he had climbed Duck Bank he turned to the left, and without stopping he burst into Shillitoe's. Not from eagerness to enter Shillitoe's, but because if he had hesitated he might never have entered at all : he might have slunk away to the old undistinguished tailor in St. Luke's Square. Shillitoe was the stylish tailor. Shillitoe made no display of goods, scorning such paltry devices. Shillitoe had wire blinds across the lower part of his window, and on the blinds in gold, "Gentlemen's tailor and outfitter. Breeches-maker." Above the blind could be seen a few green cardboard boxes. Shillitoe made breeches for men who hunted. Shillitoe's lowest price for a suit was notoriously four guineas. Shillitoe's was the resort of the fashionable youth of the town and district. It was a terrific adventure for Edwin to enter Shillitoe's. His nervousness was painful. He seemed to have a vague idea that Shillitoe might sneer at him. However, he went in. The shop was empty. He closed the door, as he might have closed the door of a dentist's. He said to himself, "Well, I'm here !" He wondered what his father would say on hearing that he had been to Shillitoe's. And what would Clara have said, had she been at home ? Then Shillitoe in person came forward from the cutting-out room and Shillitoe's tone and demeanour reassured him.

CHAPTER VI

JANET LOSES HER BET

I

ACCIDENT—that is to say, a chance somewhat more fortuitous than the common hazards which we group together and call existence—pushed Edwin into the next stage of his career. As, on one afternoon in late June, he was turning the corner of Trafalgar Road to enter the shop, he surprisingly encountered Charlie Orgreave, whom he had not seen for several years. And when he saw this figure, at once fashionably and carelessly dressed, his first thought was one of deep satisfaction that he was wearing his new Shillitoe suit of clothes. He had scarcely worn the suit at all, but that afternoon his father had sent him over to Hanbridge about a large order from Bostocks, the recently established drapers there whose extravagant advertising had shocked and pained the commerce of the Five Towns. Darius had told him to ‘titivate himself,’ a most startling injunction from Darius, and thus the new costly suit had been, as it were, officially blessed and henceforth could not be condemned.

“How do, Teddy?” Charlie greeted him. “I’ve just been in to see you at your shop.”

Edwin paused.

“Hello! The Sunday!” he said quietly. And he kept thinking, as his eyes noted details of Charlie’s raiment, “It’s a bit of luck I’ve got these clothes on.” And he was in fact rather sorry that Charlie probably paid no real attention to clothes. The new suit had caused Edwin to look at everybody’s clothes, had caused him to walk differently, and to put his shoulders back, and to change the style of his collars; had made a different man of Edwin.

“Come in, will you?” Edwin suggested.

They went into the shop together. Stifford smiled at them both, as if to felicitate them on the chance which had brought them together.

"Come in here," said Edwin, indicating the small office.

"The lion's den, eh?" observed the Sunday.

He, as much as Edwin, was a little tongue-tied and nervous.

"Sit down, will you?" said Edwin, shutting the door.

"No, take the arm-chair. I'll absquatulate on the desk. I'd no idea you were down. When did you come?"

"Last night, last train. Just a freak, you know."

II

They were within a foot of each other in the ebonized cubicle. Edwin's legs were swinging a few inches away from the arm-chair. His hat was at the back of his head, and Charlie's hat was at the back of Charlie's head. This was their sole point of resemblance. As Edwin surreptitiously examined the youth who had once been his intimate friend, he experienced the half-sneering awe of the provincial for the provincial who has become a Londoner. Charlie was changed; even his accent was changed. He and Edwin belonged to utterly different worlds now. They seldom saw the same scenes or thought the same things. But of course they were obliged by loyalty to the past to pretend that nothing was changed.

"You've not altered much," said Edwin.

And indeed, when Charlie smiled, he was almost precisely the old Sunday, despite his metropolitan mannerisms. And there was nothing whatever in his figure or deportment to show that he had lived for several years in France and could chatter in a language whose verbs had four conjugations. After all, he was less formidable than Edwin might have anticipated.

"You have, anyhow," said Charlie.

Edwin grinned self-consciously.

"I suppose you've got this place practically in your own hands now," said Charlie. "I wish *I* was on my own, I can tell you that."

An instinctive gesture from Edwin made Charlie lower his

voice in the middle of a sentence. The cubicle had the appearance, but not the reality, of being private.

"Don't you make any mistake," Edwin murmured. He, who depended on his aunt's generosity for clothes, the practical ruler of the place! Still he was glad that Charlie supposed that he ruled, even though the supposition might be mere small-talk. "You're in that hospital, aren't you?"

"Bart's."

"Bart's, is it? Yes, I remember. I expect you aren't thinking of settling down here?"

Charlie was about to reply in accents of disdain: "Not me!" But his natural politeness stayed his tongue. "I hardly think so," he said. "Too much competition here. So there is everywhere, for the matter of that." The disillusion of the young doctor were already upon Charlie. And yet people may be found who will assert that in those days there was no competition, that competition has been invented during the past ten years.

"You needn't worry about competition," said Edwin.

"Why not?"

"Why not, man! Nothing could ever stop you from getting patients - with that smile! You'll simply walk straight into anything you want."

"You think so?" Charlie affected an ironic incredulity, but he was pleased. He had met the same theory in London.

"Well, you didn't suppose degrees and things had anything to do with it, did you?" said Edwin, smiling a little superiorly. He felt, with pleasure, that he was still older than the Sunday; and it pleased him also to be able thus to utilize ideas which he had formed from observation but which by diffidence and lack of opportunity he had never expressed. "All a patient wants is to be smiled at in the right way," he continued, growing bolder. "Just look at 'em!"

"Look at who?"

"The doctors here." He dropped his voice further. "Do you know why the dad's gone to Heve?"

"Gone to Heve, has he? Left old Who-is-it?"

"Yes. I don't say Heve isn't clever, but it's his look that does the trick for him."

"You seem to go about noticing things. Any charge?"

Edwin blushed and laughed. Their nervousness was dissipated. Each was reassured of the old basis of 'decency' in the other.

III

"Look here," said Charlie. "I can't stop now."

"Hold on a bit."

"I only called to tell you that you've simply *got* to come up to-night."

"Come up where?"

"To our place. You've simply *got* to."

The secret fact was that Edwin had once more been under discussion in the house of the Orgreaves. And Osmond Orgreave had lent Janet a shilling so that she might bet Charlie a shilling that he would not succeed in bringing Edwin to the house. The understanding was that if Janet won, her father was to take sixpence of the gain. Janet herself had failed to lure Edwin into the house. He was so easy to approach and so difficult to catch. Janet was slightly piqued.

As for Edwin, he was postponing the execution of all his good resolutions until he should be installed in the new house. He could not achieve highly difficult tasks under conditions of expectancy and derangement. The whole Clayhanger premises were in a suppressed state of being packed up. In a week the removal would occur. Until the removal was over and the new order was established Edwin felt that he could still conscientiously allow his timidity to govern him, and so he had remained in his shell. The sole herald of the new order was the new suit.

"Oh! I can't come—not to-night."

"Why not?"

"We're so busy."

"Bosh to that!"

"Some other night."

"No. I'm going back to-morrow. Must. Now look here, old man, come on. I shall be very disappointed if you don't."

Edwin wondered why he could not accept and be done with it, instead of persisting in a sequence of insincere and even lying hesitations. But he could not.

"That's all right," said Charlie, as if clinching the affair. Then he lowered his voice to a scarce audible confidential whisper. "Fine girl staying up there just now!" His eyes sparkled.

"Oh! At your place?" Edwin adopted the same cautious tone. Stifford, outside, strained his ears in vain. The magic word 'girl' had in an instant thrown the shop into agitation. The shop was no longer provincial; it became a part of the universal.

"Yes. Haven't you seen her about?"

"No. Who is she?"

"Oh! Friend of Janet's. Hilda Lessways, her name is. I don't know much of her myself."

"Bit of all right, is she?" Edwin tried in a whisper to be a man of vast experience and settled views. He tried to whisper as though he whispered about women every day of his life. He thought that these Londoners were terrific on the subject of women, and he did his best to reach their level. He succeeded so well that Charlie, who, as a man, knew more of London than of the provinces, thought that after all London was nothing in comparison to the seeming quiet provinces. Charlie leaned back in his chair, drew down the corners of his mouth, nodded his head knowingly, and then quite spoiled the desired effect of doggishness by his delightfully candid smile. Neither of them had the least intention of disrespect towards the fine girl who was on their lips.

IV

Edwin said to himself: "Is it possible that he has come down specially to see this Hilda?" He thought enviously of Charlie as a free bird of the air.

"What's she like?" Edwin inquired.

"You come up and see," Charlie retorted.

"Not to night," said the fawn, in spite of Edwin.

"You come to night, or I perish in the attempt," said Charlie, in his natural voice. This phrase from their school-days made them both laugh again. They were now apparently as intimate as ever they had been.

"All right," said Edwin. "I'll come."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

"Come for a sort of supper at eight."

"Oh!" Edwin drew back. "Supper? I didn't—
Suppose I come after supper for a bit?"

"Suppose you don't!" Charlie snorted, sticking his chin out. "I'm off now. Must."

They stood a moment together at the door of the shop, in the declining warmth of the summer afternoon, mutually satisfied.

"So-long!"

"So-long!"

The Sunday elegantly departed. Edwin had given his word, and he felt as he might have felt had surgeons just tied him to the operating-table. Nevertheless he was not ill-pleased with his own demeanour in front of Charlie. And he liked Charlie as much as ever. He should rely on Charlie as a support during this adventure into the worldly regions peopled by fine girls. He pictured this Hilda as being more romantic and strange than Janet Orgreave; he pictured her as mysteriously superior. And he was afraid of his own image of her.

At tea in the dismantled sitting-room, though he was going out to supper, he ate quite as much tea as usual, from sheer poltroonery. He said as casually as he could—

"By the way, Charlie Orgreave called this afternoon."

"Did he?" said Maggie.

"He's off back to London to-morrow. He would have me slip up there to-night to see him."

"And shall you?"

"I think so," said Edwin, with an appearance of indecision.

"I may as well."

It was the first time that there had ever been question of him visiting a private house, except his aunt's, at night. To him the moment marked an epoch, the inception of freedom; but the phlegmatic Maggie showed no sign of excitement—"Clara would have gone into a fit!" he reflected)—and his father only asked a casual question about Charlie.

CHAPTER VII

LANE END HOUSE

I

HERE was another of those impressive square halls, on the other side of the suddenly opened door of Lane End House. But Edwin was now getting accustomed to square halls. Nevertheless he quaked as he stood on the threshold. An absurd young man! He wondered whether he would ever experience the sensation of feeling authentically grown-up. Behind him in the summer twilight lay the large oval lawn, and the gates which once had doubtless marked the end of Manor Lane—now Oak Street. And actually he had an impulse to rush back upon his steps, and bring on himself eternal shame. The servant, however, primly held him with her eyes alone, and he submitted to her sway.

“Mr. Charles in?” he inquired glumly, affecting non-chalance.

The servant bowed her head with a certain condescending deference, as who should say: “Do not let us pretend that they are not expecting you.”

A door to the right opened. Janet was revealed, and, behind her, Charlie. Both were laughing. There was a sound of a piano. As soon as Charlie caught sight of Edwin he exclaimed to Janet—

“Where’s my bob?”

“Charlie!” she protested, checking her laughter.

“Why! What have I said?” Charlie inquired, with mock innocence, perceiving that he had been indiscreet, and trying to remedy his rash mistake. “Surely I can say ‘bob’!”

Edwin understood nothing of this brief passage. Janet, ignoring Charlie and dismissing the servant with an imperceptible sign, advanced to the visitor. She was dressed in

white, and Edwin considered her to be extraordinarily graceful, dignified, sweet, and welcoming. There was a peculiar charm in the way in which her skirts half-reluctantly followed her along the carpet, causing beautiful curves of drapery from the waist. And her smile was so warm and so sincere! For the moment she really felt that Edwin's presence in the house satisfied the keenest of her desires, and of course her face generously expressed what she felt.

"Well, Miss Orgreave," Edwin grinned. "Here I am, you see!"

"And we're delighted," said Janet simply, taking his hand. She might have amiably teased him about the protracted difficulties of getting him. She might have hinted an agreeable petulance against the fact that the brother had succeeded where the sister had failed. Her sisterly manner to Charlie a little earlier had perhaps shown flashes of such thoughts in her mind. But no. In the presence of Edwin, Janet's extreme good-nature forgot everything save that he was there, a stranger to be received and cherished.

"Here! Give us that tile," said Charlie.

"Beautiful evening," Edwin observed.

"Oh! Isn't it!" breathed Janet, in ecstasy, and gazed from the front door into the western sky. "We were out on the lawn, but mother said it was damp. It wasn't," she laughed. "But if you think it's damp, it is damp, isn't it? Will you come and see mother? Charlie, you can leave the front door open."

Edwin said to himself that she had all the attractiveness of a girl and of a woman. She preceded him towards the door to the right. Charlie hovered behind, on springs. Edwin, nervously pulling out his handkerchief and putting it back, had a confused vision of the hall full of little pictures, plates, stools, rugs, and old sword-sheaths. There seemed to him to be far more knick-knacks in that hall than in the whole of his father's house; Mr. Orgreave's ingeniously contrived bookshelves were simply overlaid and smothered in knick-knacks. Janet pushed at the door, and the sound of the piano suddenly increased in volume.

II

There was no cessation of the music as the three entered. As it were beneath the music, Mrs. Orgreave, a stout and faded, calm lady, greeted him kindly: "Mr. Edwin!" She was shorter than Janet, but Edwin could see Janet in her movements and in her full lips. "Well, Edwin!" said Osmond Orgreave with lazy and distinguished good-nature, shaking hands. Jimmie and Johnnie, now aged nineteen and eighteen respectively, were in the room; Johnnie was reading; their blushing awkwardness in salutation and comic efforts to be curtly benevolent in the manner of clubmen somewhat eased the tension in Edwin. They addressed him as 'Clayhanger.' The eldest and the youngest child of the family sat at the piano in the act of performing a duet. Tom, pale, slight, near-sighted and wearing spectacles, had reached the age of thirty-two, and was junior partner in a firm of solicitors at Hanbridge; Bursley seldom saw him. Alicia had the delightful gawkinsness of twelve years. One only of the seven children was missing. Marian, aged thirty, and married in London, with two little babies; Marian was adored by all her brothers and sisters, and most by Janet, who, during visits of the married sister, fell back with worshipping joy into her original situation of second daughter.

Edwin, Charles, and Janet sat down on a sofa. It was not until after a moment that Edwin noticed an ugly young woman who sat behind the players and turned over the pages of music for them. "Surely that can't be his wonderful Hilda!" Edwin thought. In the excitement of arrival he had forgotten the advertised Hilda. Was that she? The girl could be no other. Edwin made the reflection that all men make: "Well, it's astonishing what other fellows like!" And, having put down Charlie several points in his esteem, he forgot Hilda.

Evidently loud and sustained conversation was not expected nor desired while the music lasted. And Edwin was glad of this. It enabled him to get his breath and his bearings in what was to him really a tremendous ordeal. And in fact he was much more agitated than even he imagined. The room itself abashed him.

Everybody, including Mr. Orgreave, had said that the Clayhanger drawing-room with its bay-window was a fine apartment. But the Orgreave drawing-room had a bay-window and another large window ; it was twice as big as the Clayhangers' and of an interesting irregular shape. Although there were in it two unoccupied expanses of carpet, it nevertheless contained what seemed to Edwin immense quantities of furniture of all sorts. Easy chairs were common, and everywhere. Several bookcases rose to the low ceiling ; dozens and dozens of pictures hid the walls ; each corner had its little society of objects ; cushions and candlesticks abounded ; the piano was a grand, and Edwin was astounded to see another piano, a small upright, in the farther distance ; there were even two fire-places, with two mirrors, two clocks, two sets of ornaments, and two embroidered screens. The general effect was of extraordinary lavish profusion—of wilful, splendid, careless extravagance.

Yet the arm of the sofa on which Edwin leaned was threadbare in two different places. The room was faded and worn, like its mistress. Like its mistress it seemed to exhale a silent and calm authority, based on historic tradition.

And the room was historic ; it had been the theatre of history. For twenty-five years—ever since Tom was seven—it had witnessed the adventurous domestic career of the Orgreaves, so quiet superficially, so exciting in reality. It was the drawing-room of a man who had consistently used immense powers of industry for the satisfaction of his prodigal instincts ; it was the drawing-room of a woman whose placidity no danger could disturb, and who cared for nothing if only her husband was amused. Spend and gain ! And, for a change, gain and spend ! That was the method. Work till sheer exhaustion beat you. Plan, scheme, devise ! Satisfy your curiosity and your other instincts ! Experiment ! Accept risks ! Buy first, order first, pledge yourself first ; and then split your head in order to pay and to redeem ! When chance aids you to accumulate, let the pile grow, out of mere perversity, and then scatter it royally ! Play heartily ! Play with the same intentness as you work ! Live to the uttermost instant and to the last flicker of energy ! Such was the spirit of Osmond Orgreave, and the spirit which

reigned in the house generally, if not in every room of the house.

III

For each child had its room—except Jimmie and Johnnie, who shared one. And each room was the fortress of an egoism, the theatre of a separate drama, mysterious, and sacred from the others. Jimmie could not remember having been in Janet's room—it was forbidden by Alicia, who was jealous of her sole right of entrée—and nobody would have dreamed of violating the chamber of Jimmie and Johnnie to discover the origin of peculiar noises that puzzled the household at seven o'clock in the morning. As for Tom's castle—it was a legend to the younger children ; it was supposed to be wondrous.

All the children had always cost money, and a great deal of money, until Marian had left the family in deep gloom for her absence, and Tom, with a final wrench of a vast sum from the willing but wincing father, had settled into a remunerative profession. Tom was now keeping himself and repaying the weakened parent. The rest cost more and more every year as their minds and bodies budded and flowered. It was endless, it was staggering, it would not bear thinking about. The long and varied chronicle of it was somehow written on the drawing-room as well as on the faces of the father and mother—on the drawing-room which had the same dignified, childlike, indefatigable, invincible, jolly expression as its owners. Threadbare in places ? And why not ? The very identical Turkey carpet at which Edwin gazed in his self-consciousness—on that carpet Janet the queenly and mature had sprawled as an infant while her mother, a fresh previous Janet of less than thirty, had cooed and said incomprehensible foolishness to her. Tom was patriarchal because he had vague memories of an earlier drawing-room, misted in far antiquity. Threadbare ? By heaven, its mere survival was magnificent ! I say that it was a miraculous drawing-room. Its chairs were humanized. Its little cottage piano that nobody ever opened now unless Tom had gone mad on something for two pianos, because it was so impossibly tinny—the cottage piano could humanly recall the touch of a perfect

baby when Marian the wife sat down to it. Marian was one of your silly sentimental nice things ; on account of its associations, she really preferred the cottage piano to the grand. The two carpets were both resigned, grim old humanities, used to dirty heels, and not caring, or pretending not to care. What did the curtains know of history ? Naught. They were always new ; they could not last. But even the newest curtains would at once submit to the influence of the room, and take on something of its physiognomy, and help to express its comfortableness. You could not hang a week in front of one of those windows without being subtly informed by the tradition of adventurous happiness that presided over the room. It was that : a drawing-room in which a man and a woman, and boys and girls, had been on the whole happy, if often apprehensive.

IV

The music began to engage Edwin's attention. It was music of a kind quite novel to him. Most of it had no meaning for him, but at intervals some fragment detached itself from the mass, and stood out beautiful. It was as if he were gazing at a stage in gloom, but lighted momentarily by fleeting rays that revealed a lovely detail and were bafflingly cut off. Occasionally he thought he noticed a recurrence of the same fragment. Murmurs came from behind the piano. He looked cautiously. Alicia was making faces of alarm and annoyance. She whispered : " Oh dear ! . . . It's no use ! . . . We're all wrong, I'm sure ! " Tom kept his eyes on the page in front of him, doggedly playing. Then Edwin was conscious of dissonances. And then the music stopped.

" Now, Alicia," her father protested mildly, " you mustn't be nervous."

" Nervous ! " exclaimed Alicia. " Tom's just as nervous as I am ! So *he* needn't talk." She was as red as a cock's crest.

Tom was not talking. He pointed several times violently to a place on Alicia's half of the open book—she was playing the bass part. " There ! There ! " The music recommenced.

" She's always nervous like that," Janet whispered kindly, " when anyone's here. But she doesn't like to be told."

"She plays splendidly," Edwin responded: "Do you play?"

Janet shook her head.

"Yes, she does," Charlie whispered.

"Keep on, darling. You're at the end now." Edwin heard a low, stern voice. That must be the voice of Hilda. A second later, he looked across, and surprised her glance, which was intensely fixed on himself. She dropped her eyes quickly; he also.

Then he felt by the nature of the chords that the piece was closing. The music ceased. Mr. Orgreave clapped his hands. "Bravo! Bravo!"

"Why," cried Charlie to the performers, "you weren't within ten bars of each other!" And Edwin wondered how Charlie could tell that. As for him, he did not know enough of music to be able to turn over the pages for others. He felt himself to be an ignoramus among a company of brilliant experts.

"Well," said Mr. Orgreave, "I suppose we may talk a bit now. It's more than our place is worth to breathe aloud while these Rubinsteins are doing Beethoven!" He looked at Edwin, who grinned.

"Oh! My word!" smiled Mrs. Orgreave, supporting her hand.

"Beethoven, is it?" Edwin muttered. He was acquainted only with the name, and had never heard it pronounced as Mr. Orgreave pronounced it.

"One symphony a night!" Mr. Orgreave said, with irony. "And we're only at the second, it seems. Seven more to come. What do you think of that, Edwin?"

"Very fine!"

"Let's have the 'Lost Chord,' Janet," Mr. Orgreave suggested.

There was a protesting chorus of "Oh, dad!"

"Very well! Very well!" the father murmured, acting humility. "I'm snubbed!"

Tom had now strolled across the room, smiling to himself, and looking at the carpet, in an effort to behave as one who had done nothing in particular.

"How d'ye do, Clayhanger?" He greeted Edwin, and

grasped his hand in a feverish clutch. "You must excuse us. We aren't used to audiences. That's the worst of being rotten amateurs."

Edwin rose. "Oh!" he deprecated. He had never spoken to Tom Orgreave before, but Tom seemed ready to treat him at once as an established acquaintance.

Then Alicia had to come forward and shake hands. She could not get a word out.

"Now, baby!" Charlie teased her.

She tossed her mane, and found refuge by her mother's side. Mrs. Orgreave caressed the mane into order.

"This is Miss Lessways. Hilda—Mr. Edwin Clayhanger." Janet drew the dark girl towards her as the latter hovered uncertainly in the middle of the room, her face forced into the look of elaborate negligence conventionally assumed by every self-respecting person who waits to be introduced. She took Edwin's hand limply, and failed to meet his glance. Her features did not soften. Edwin was confirmed in the impression of her obdurate ugliness. He just noticed her olive skin and black eyes and hair. She was absolutely different in type from any of the Clayhangers. The next instant she and Charlie were talking together.

Edwin felt the surprised relief of one who has plunged into the sea and discovers himself fairly bouyant on the threatening waves.

"Janet," asked Mrs. Orgreave, "will supper be ready?"

In the obscurer corners of the room grey shadows gathered furtively, waiting their time.

v

"Seen my latest, Charlie?" asked Tom, in his thin voice.

"No, what is it?" Charlie replied. The younger brother was flattered by this proof of esteem from the elder, but he did his best by casualness of tone to prevent the fact from transpiring.

All the youths were now standing in a group in the middle of the drawing-room. Their faces showed pale and more distinct than their bodies in the darkening twilight. Mrs. Orgreave, her husband, and the girls had gone into the dining-room.

Tom Orgreave, with the gestures of a precisian, drew a bunch of keys from his pocket, and unlocked a rosewood bookcase that stood between the two windows. Jimmie winked to Johnnie, and included Edwin in the fellowship of the wink, which meant that Tom was more comic than Tom thought, with his locked bookcases and his simple vanities of a collector. Tom collected books. As Edwin gazed at the bookcase he perceived that it was filled mainly with rich bindings. And suddenly all his own book-buying seemed to him petty and pitiful. He saw books in a new aspect. He had need of no instruction, of no explanation. The amorous care with which Tom drew a volume from the bookcase was enough in itself to enlighten Edwin completely. He saw that a book might be more than reading matter, might be a bibelot, a curious jewel, to satisfy the lust of the eye and of the hand. He instantly condemned his own few books as being naught; he was ashamed of them. Each book in that bookcase was a separate treasure.

"See this, my boy?" said Tom, handing to Charlie a calf-bound volume, with a crest on the sides. "Six volumes. Picked them up at Stafford—Assizes, you know. It's the Wilbraham crest. I never knew they'd been selling their library."

Charlie accepted the book with respect. Its edges were gilt, and the paper thin and soft. Edwin looked over his shoulder, and saw the title-page of Victor Hugo's "Notre Dame de Paris," in French. The volume had a most romantic, foreign, even exotic air. Edwin desired it fervently, or something that might rank equal with it.

"How much did they stick you for this lot?" asked Charlie.

Tom held up one finger.

"Quid?" Charlie wanted to be sure. Tom nodded.

"Cheap as dirt, of course!" said Tom. "Binding's worth more than that. Look at the other volumes. Look at them!"

"Pity it's only a second edition," said Charlie.

"Well, damn it, man! One can't have everything."

Charlie passed the volume to Edwin, who fingered it with the strangest delight. Was it possible that this exquisitely

delicate and uncustomary treasure, which seemed to exhale all the charm of France and the savour of her history, had been found at Stafford? He had been to Stafford himself. He had read "Notre Dame" himself, but in English, out of a common book like any common book—not out of a bibelot.

"You've read it, of course, Clayhanger?" Tom said.

"Oh!" Edwin answered humbly. "Only in a translation." Yet there was a certain falseness in his humility, for he was proud of having read the work. What sort of a duffer would he have appeared had he been obliged to reply 'No'?

"You ought to read French *in* French," said Tom, kindly authoritative.

"Can't," said Edwin.

"Bosh!" Charlie cried. "You were always spiffing in French. You could simply knock spots off me."

"And do you read French in French, the Sunday?" Edwin asked.

"Well," said Charlie, "I must say it was Thomas put me up to it. You simply begin to read, that's all. What you don't understand, you miss. But you soon understand. You can always look at a dictionary if you feel like it. I usually don't."

"I'm sure *you* could read French easily in a month," said Tom. "They always gave a good grounding at Oldcastle. There's simply nothing in it."

"Really!" Edwin murmured, relinquishing the book. "I must have a shot, I never thought of it." And he never thought of reading French for pleasure. He had construed Xavier de Maistre's "Voyage autour de ma Chambre" for marks, assuredly not for pleasure. "Are there any books in this style to be got on that bookstall in Hanbridge Market?" he inquired of Tom.

"Sometimes," said Tom, wiping his spectacles. "Oh yes!"

It was astounding to Edwin how blind he had been to the romance of existence in the Five Towns.

"I's all very well," observed Charlie reflectively, fingering one or two of the other volumes—"it's all very well, and Victor Hugo is Victor Hugo; but you can say what you

like—there's a lot of this that'll bear skipping, your worships."

"Not a line!" said a passionate, vibrating voice.

The voice so startled and thrilled Edwin that he almost jumped, as he looked round. To Edwin it was dramatic; it was even dangerous and threatening. He had never heard a quiet voice so charged with intense emotion. Hilda Lessways had come back to the room, and she stood near the door, her face gleaming in the dusk. She stood like an Amazonian defender of the aged poet. Edwin asked himself, "Can anyone be so excited as that about a book?" The eyes, lips, and nostrils were a revelation to him. He could feel his heart beating. But the girl strongly repelled him. Nobody else appeared to be conscious that anything singular had occurred. Jimmie and Johnnie sidled out of the room.

"Oh! Indeed!" Charlie directed his candid and yet faintly ironic smile upon Hilda Lessways. "Don't *you* think that some of it's dullish, Teddy?"

Edwin blushed. "Well, ye-es," he answered, honestly judicial.

"Mrs. Orgreave wants to know when you're coming to supper," said Hilda, and left.

Tom was relocking the bookcase.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FAMILY SUPPER

I

"**N**OW, father, let's have a bottle of wine, eh?" Charlie vociferously suggested. Mr. Orgreave hesitated: "You'd better ask your mother."

"Really, Charlie——" Mrs. Orgreave began.

"Oh yes!" Charlie cut her short. "Right you are, Martha!"

The servant, who had stood waiting for a definite command during this brief conflict of wills, glanced interrogatively at Mrs. Orgreave and, perceiving no clear prohibition in her face, departed with a smile to get the wine. She was a servant of sound prestige, and had the inexpressible privilege of smiling on duty. In her time she had fought lively battles of repartee with all the children from Charlie downwards. Janet humoured Martha, and Martha humoured Mrs. Orgreave.

The whole family (save absent Marian) was now gathered in the dining-room, another apartment on whose physiognomy were written in cipher the annals of the vivacious tribe. Here the curtains were drawn, and all the interest of the room was centred on the large white gleaming table, about which the members stood or sat under the downward radiance of a chandelier. Beyond the circle illuminated by the shaded chandelier could be discerned dim forms of furniture and of pictures, with a glint of high light here and there burning on the corner of some gold frame. Mr. and Mrs. Orgreave sat at either end of the table. Alicia stood by her father, with one arm half round his neck. Tom sat near his mother. Janet and Hilda sat together, flanked by Jimmie and Johnnie, who stood, having pushed chairs away. Charlie and Edwin stood opposite. The table seemed to Edwin to be heaped

with food: cold and yet rich remains of bird and beast; a large fruit pie, opened; another intact; some puddings; cheese; sandwiches; raw fruit; at Janet's elbow were cups and saucers and a pot of coffee; a large glass jug of lemonade shone near by; plates, glasses, and cutlery were strewn about irregularly. The effect upon Edwin was one of immense and careless prodigality; it intoxicated him; it made him feel that a grand profuseness was the finest thing in life. In his own home the supper consisted of cheese, bread, and water, save on Sundays, when cold sausages were generally added, to make a feast. But the idea of the price of living as the Orgreaves lived seriously startled the prudence in him. Imagine that expense always persisting, day after day, night after night! There were certainly at least four in the family who bought clothes at Shillitoe's, and everybody looked elaborately costly, except Hilda Lessways, who did not flatter the eye. But equally, they all seemed quite unconscious of their costliness.

"Now, Charlie darling, you must look after Mr. Edwin," said Mrs. Orgreave.

"She never calls *us* darling," said Johnnie, affecting disgust.

"She will, as soon as you've left home," said Janet, ironically soothing.

"I *do*, I often do!" Mrs. Orgreave asserted. "Much oftener than you deserve."

"Sit down, Teddy," Charlie enjoined.

"Oh! I'm all right, thanks," said Edwin.

"Sit *down*!" Charlie insisted, using force.

"Do you talk to your poor patients in that tone?" Alicia inquired, from the shelter of her father.

"Here I come down specially to see them," Charlie mused aloud, as he twisted the corkscrew into the cork of the bottle, unceremoniously handed to him by Martha, "and not only they don't offer to pay my fares, but they grudge me a drop of claret! Plupp!" He grimaced as the cork came out. "And my last night, too! Hilda, this is better than coffee, as St. Paul remarked on a famous occasion. Pass your glass."

"Charlie!" his mother protested. "I'll thank you to leave St. Paul out."

"Charlie! Your mother will be boxing your ears if you don't mind," his father warned him.

"I'll not have it!" said his mother, shaking her head in a fashion that she imagined to be harsh and forbidding.

II

Towards the close of the meal, Mr. Orgreave said—

"Well, Edwin, what does your father say about Bradlaugh?"

"He doesn't say much," Edwin replied.

"Let me see, does he call himself a Liberal?"

"He calls himself a Liberal," said Edwin, shifting on his chair. "Yes, he calls himself a Liberal. But I'm afraid he's a regular old Tory."

Edwin blushed, laughing, as half the family gave way to more or less violent mirth.

"Father's a regular old Tory too," Charlie grinned.

"Oh! I'm sorry," said Edwin.

"Yes, father's a regular old Tory," agreed Mr. Orgreave. "Don't apologize! Don't apologize! I'm used to these attacks. I've been nearly kicked out of my own house once. But some one has to keep the flag flying."

It was plain that Mr. Orgreave enjoyed the unloosing of the hurricane which he had brought about. Mrs. Orgreave used to say that he employed that particular tone from a naughty love of mischief. In a moment all the boys were upon him, except Jimmie, who, out of sheer intellectual snobbery, as the rest averred, supported his father. Atheistical Bradlaugh had been exciting the British public to disputation for a long time, and the Bradlaugh question happened then to be acute. In that very week the Northampton member had been committed to custody for outraging Parliament, and released. And it was known that Gladstone meant immediately to bring in a resolution for permitting members to affirm, instead of taking oath by appealing to a God. Than this complication of theology and politics nothing could have been better devised to impassion an electorate which had but two genuine interests—theology and politics. The rumour of the feverish affair had spread to the most isolated communities. People talked theology, and people talked politics,

who had till then only felt silently on these subjects. In loquacious families Bradlaugh caused dissension and division, more real perhaps than apparent, for not all Bradlaugh's supporters had the courage to avow themselves such. It was not easy, at any rate it was not easy in the Five Towns, for a timid man in reply to the question, "Are you in favour of a professed Freethinker sitting in the House of Commons?" to reply, "Yes, I am." There was something shameless in that word 'professed.' If the Freethinker had been ashamed of his freethinking, if he had sought to conceal it in phrases,—the implication was that the case might not have been so bad. This was what astonished Edwin: the candour with which Bradlaugh's position was upheld in the dining-room of the Orgreaves. It was as if he were witnessing deeds of wilful perilous daring.

But the conversation was not confined to Bradlaugh, for Bradlaugh was not a perfect test for separating Liberals and Tories. Nobody in the room, for example, was quite convinced that Mr. Orgreave was anti-Bradlaugh. To satisfy their instincts for father-baiting, the boys had to include other topics, such as Ireland and the proposal for Home Rule. As for Mr. Orgreave, he could and did always infuriate them by refusing to answer seriously. The fact was that this was his device for maintaining his prestige among the turbulent mob. Dignified and brilliantly clever as Osmond Orgreave had the reputation of being in the town, he was somehow outshone in cleverness at home, and he never put the bar of his dignity between himself and his children. Thus he could only keep the upper hand by allowing hints to escape from him of the secret amusement roused in him by the comicality of the spectacle of his filial enemies. He had one great phrase which he would drawl out at them with the accents of a man who is trying politely to hide his contempt: "You'll learn better as you get older."

III

Edwin, who said little, thought the relationship between father and sons utterly delightful. He had not conceived that parents and children ever were or could be on such terms.

"Now what do you say, Edwin?" Mr. Orgreave asked.
"Are you a—— Charlie, pass me that bottle."

Charlie was helping himself to another glass of wine. The father, the two elder sons, and Edwin alone had drunk of the wine. Edwin had never tasted wine in his life, and the effect of half a glass on him was very agreeable and strange.

"Oh, dad! I just want a——" Charlie objected, holding the bottle in the air above his glass.

"Charlie," said his mother, "do you hear your father?"

"Pass me that bottle," Mr. Orgreave repeated.

Charlie obeyed, proclaiming himself a martyr. Mr. Orgreave filled his own glass, emptying the bottle, and began to sip.

"This will do me more good than you, young man," he said. Then turning again to Edwin: "Are you a Bradlaugh man?"

And Edwin, uplifted, said: "All I say is—you can't help what you believe. You can't make yourself believe anything. And I don't see why you should, either. There's no virtue in believing."

"Hooray!" cried the sedate Tom.

"No virtue in believing! Eh, Mr. Edwin! Mr. Edwin!"

This sad expostulation came from Mrs. Orgreave.

"Don't you see what I mean?" he persisted vivaciously, reddening. But he could not express himself further.

"Hooray!" repeated Tom.

Mrs. Orgreave shook her head, with grieved good-nature.

"You mustn't take mother too seriously," said Janet, smiling. "She only puts on that expression to keep worse things from being said. She's only pretending to be upset. Nothing could upset her, really. She's past being upset—she's been through so much—haven't you, you poor dear?"

In looking at Janet, Edwin caught the eyes of Hilda blazing on him fixedly. Her head seemed to tremble, and he glanced away. She had added nothing to the discussion. And indeed Janet herself had taken no part in the politics, content merely to advise the combatants upon their demeanour.

"So you're against me too, Edwin!" Mr. Orgreave sighed with mock melancholy. "Well, this is no place for me." He

rose, lifted Alicia and put her into his arm-chair, and then went towards the door.

"You aren't going to work, are you, Osmond?" his wife asked, turning her head.

"I am," said he.

He disappeared amid a wailing chorus of "Oh, dad!"

CHAPTER IX IN THE PORCH

I

WHEN the front door of the Orgreaves interposed itself that night between Edwin and a little group of gas-lit faces, he turned away towards the warm gloom of the garden in a state of happy excitement. He had left fairly early, despite protests, because he wished to give his father no excuse for a spectacular display of wrath; Edwin's desire for a tranquil existence was growing steadily. But now that he was in the open air, he did not want to go home. He wanted to be in full possession of himself, at leisure and in freedom, and to examine the treasure of his sensations. "It's been rather quiet," the Orgreaves had said. "We generally have people dropping in." Quiet! It was the least quiet evening he had ever spent.

He was intoxicated; not with wine, though he had drunk wine. A group of well-intentioned philanthropists, organized into a powerful society for combating the fearful evils of alcoholism, had seized Edwin at the age of twelve and made him bind himself with solemn childish signature and ceremonies never to taste alcohol save by doctor's orders. He thought of this pledge in the garden of the Orgreaves. "Damned rot!" he murmured, and dismissed the pledge from his mind as utterly unimportant if not indeed fatuous. No remorse! The whole philosophy of asceticism inspired him, at that moment, with impatient scorn. It was the hope of pleasure that intoxicated him, the vision which he had had of the possibilities of being really interested in life. He saw new avenues toward joy, and the sight thereof made him tingle, less with the desire to be immediately at them than with the present ecstasy of contemplating them. He was conscious of actual physical tremors and agreeable

smartings in his head ; electric disturbances. But he did not reason ; he felt. He was passive, not active. He would not even, just then, attempt to make new plans. He was in a beatitude, his mouth unaware that it was smiling.

II

Behind him was the lighted house ; in front the gloom of the lawn ending in shrubberies and gates, with a street-lamp beyond. And there was silence, save for the vast furnace-breathings, coming over undulating miles, which the people of the Five Towns, hearing them always, never hear. A great deal of diffused light filtered through the cloudy sky. The warm wandering airs were humid on the cheek. He must return home. He could not stand dreaming all the night in the garden of the Orgreaves. To his right uprose the great rectangular mass of his father's new house, entirely free of scaffolding, having all the aspect of a house inhabited. It looked enormous. He was proud of it. In such an abode, and so close to the Orgreaves, what could he not do ?

Why go to gaze on it again ? There was no common sense in doing so. And yet he felt : " I must have another glance at it before I go home." From his attitude towards it, he might have been the creator of that house. That house was like one of his more successful drawings. When he had done a drawing that he esteemed, he was always looking at it. He would look at it before running down to breakfast ; and after breakfast, instead of going straight to the shop, he would rush upstairs to have still another look at it. The act of inspection gave him pleasure. So with the house. Strange, superficially ; but the simple explanation was that for some things he had the eyes of love. . . . Yes, in his dancing and happy brain the impulse to revisit the house was not to be conquered.

The few battered yards of hedge between his father's land and that of Mr. Orgreave seemed more passable in the night. He crunched along the gravel, stepped carefully with noiseless foot on the flower-bed, and then pushed himself right through the frail bushes, forgetting the respect to his suit. The beginning of summer had dried the sticky clay of the new garden ; paths had already been traced on it, and trenches

cut for the draining of the lawn that was to be. Edwin in the night saw the new garden finished, mellow, blooming with such blossoms as were sold in St. Luke's Market ; he had scarcely ever seen flowers growing in the mass. He saw himself reclining in the garden with a rare and beautiful book in his hand, while the sound of Beethoven's music came to him through the open window of the drawing-room. In so far as he saw Maggie at all, he saw her somehow mysteriously elegant and vivacious. He did not see his father. His fancy had little relation to reality. But this did not mar his pleasure. . . . Then he saw himself talking over the hedge, wittily, to amiable and witty persons in the garden of the Orgreaves.

III

He had not his key to the new house, but he knew a way of getting into it through the cellar. No reason in doing so ; nevertheless he must get into it, must localize his dream in it ! He crouched down under the blank east wall, and, feet foremost, disappeared slowly, as though the house were swallowing him. He stood on the stillage of the cellar, and struck a match. Immense and weird, the cellar ; and the doorless doorway, leading to the cellar steps, seemed to lead to affrighting matters. He was in the earth, in it, with the smells of damp mortar and of bricks and of the earth itself about him, and above him rose the house, a room over him, and a room over that and another over that, and then the chimney-cowl up in the sky. He jumped from the stillage, and went quickly to the doorway and saw the cellar steps. His heart was beating. He trembled, he was afraid, exquisitely afraid, acutely conscious of himself amid the fundamental mysteries of the universe. He reached the top of the steps as the match expired. After a moment he could distinguish the forms of things in the hall, even the main features of the pattern of the tiles. The small panes in the glazed front door, whose varied tints repeated those of the drawing-room window in daytime, now showed a uniform dull grey, lifeless. The cellar was formidable below, and the stairs curved upwards into the formidable. But he climbed them. The house seemed full of inexplicable noises. When he

stopped to listen he could hear scores of different infinitesimal sounds. His spine thrilled, as if a hand delicate and terrible had run down it in a caress. All the unknown of the night and of the universe was pressing upon him, but it was he alone who had created the night and the universe. He reached his room, the room in which he meant to inaugurate the new life and the endeavour towards perfection. Already, after his manner, he had precisely settled where the bed was to be, and where the table, and all the other objects of his world. There he would sit and read rare and beautiful books in the original French ! And there he would sit to draw ! And to the right of the hearth over bookshelves would be such and such a picture, and to the left of the hearth over bookshelves such and such another picture. . . . Only, now, he could not dream in the room as he had meant to dream ; because beyond the open door was the empty landing and the well of the stairs and all the terror of the house. The terror came and mingled with the delicious sensations that had seized him in the solitude of the garden of the Orgreaves. No ! Never had he been so intensely alive as then !

He went cautiously to the window and looked forth. Instantly the terror of the house was annihilated. It fell away was gone. He was not alone in his fancy-created universe. The reassuring illusion of reality came back like a clap of thunder. He could see a girl insinuating herself through the gap in the hedge which he had made ten minutes earlier.

IV

"What the deuce is she after ? " he muttered. He wondered whether, if she happened to glance upwards, she would be able to see him. He stood away a little from the window, but as in the safer position he could no longer distinguish her he came again close to the glass. After all, there could be no risk of her seeing him. And if she did see him,—the fright would be hers, not his.

Having passed through the hedge, she stopped, bent down, leaning backward and to one side, and lifted the hem of her skirt to examine it ; possibly it was torn ; then she dropped it. By that black, tight skirt and by something in her walk he

knew she was Hilda ; he could not decipher her features. She moved towards the new house, very slowly, as if she had emerged for an aimless nocturnal stroll. Strange and disquieting creature ! He peered as far as he could leftwards, to see the west wall of Lane End House. In a window of the upper floor a light burned. The family had doubtless gone to bed, or were going. . . . And she had wandered forth solitary and was trespassing in his garden. "Cheek !" If ever he got an opportunity he should mysteriously tease her on the subject of illegal night excursions ! Yes, he should be very witty and ironic. "Nothing but cheek !" He was confirmed in his hostility to her. She had no charm, and yet the entire Orgreave family was apparently infatuated about her. Her interruption on behalf of Victor Hugo seemed to be savage. Girls ought not to use that ruthless tone. And her eyes were hard, even cruel. She was less feminine than masculine. Her hair was not like a girl's hair.

She still came on, until the projecting roof of the bay-window beneath him hid her from sight. He would have opened his window and leaned out to glimpse her, could he have done so without noise. Where was she ? In the garden porch ? She did not reappear. She might be capable of getting into the house ! She might even then actually be getting into the house ! She was queer, incalculable. Supposing that she was in the habit of surreptitiously visiting the house, and had found a key to fit one of the doors, or supposing that she could push up a window,—she would doubtless mount the stairs and trap him ! Absurd, these speculations ; as absurd as a nightmare ! But they influenced his conduct. He felt himself forced to provide against the wildest hazards. Abruptly he departed from the bedroom and descended the stairs, stamping, clumping, with all possible noise ; in addition he whistled. This was to warn her to fly. He stopped in the hall until she had had time to fly, and then he lit a match as a signal which surely no carelessness could miss. He could have gone direct by the front door into the street, so leaving her to her odd self ; but, instead, he drew back the slip-catch of the garden door and opened it, self-consciously humming a tune.

She was within the porch. She turned deliberately to look

at him. He could feel his heart-beats. His cheeks burned, and yet he was chilled.

"Who's there?" he asked. But he did not succeed to his own satisfaction in acting alarmed surprise.

"Me!" said Hilda, challengingly, rudely.

"Oh!" he murmured, at a loss. "Did you want me? Did anyone want me?"

"Yes," she said. "I just wanted to ask you something." She paused. He could not see her scowling, but it seemed to him that she must be. He remembered that she had rather thick eyebrows, and that when she brought them nearer together by a frown, they made almost one continuous line, the effect of which was not attractive.

"Did you know I was in here?"

"Yes. That's my bedroom window over there—I've left the gas up—and I saw you get through the hedge. So I came down. They'd all gone off to bed except Tom, and I told him I was just going a walk in the garden for a bit. They never worry me, you know. They let me alone. I knew you'd got into the house, by the light."

"But I only struck a match a second ago," he protested.

"Excuse me," she said coldly; "I saw a light quite five minutes ago."

"Oh yes!" he apologized. "I remember. When I came up the cellar steps."

"I dare say you think it's very queer of me," she continued.

"Not at all," he said quickly.

"Yes you do," she bitterly insisted. "But I want to know. Did you mean it when you said—you know, at supper—that there's no virtue in believing?"

"Did I say there was no virtue in believing?" he stammeringly demanded.

"Of course you did!" she remonstrated. "Do you mean to say you can say a thing like that and then forget about it? If it's true, it's one of the most wonderful things that were ever said. And that's why I wanted to know if you meant it or whether you were only saying it because it sounded clever. That's what they're always doing in that house, you know,—being clever!" Her tone was invariably harsh.

"Yes," he said simply, "I meant it. Why?"

"You did?" Her voice seemed to search for insincerity. "Well, thank you. That's all. It may mean a new life to me. I'm always trying to believe; always! Aren't you?"

"I don't know," he mumbled. "How do you mean?"

"Well—you know!" she said, as if impatiently smashing his pretence of not understanding her. "But perhaps you do believe?"

He thought he detected scorn for a facile believer. "No," he said, "I don't."

"And it doesn't worry you? Honestly? Don't be clever! I hate that!"

"No," he said.

"Don't you ever think about it?"

"No. Not often."

"Charlie does."

"Has he told you?" ("So she talks to the Sunday too!" he reflected.)

"Yes; but of course I quite see why it doesn't worry you—if you honestly think there's no virtue in believing."

"Well," said Edwin. "Is there?" The more he looked at it through her eyes, the more wonderful profundities he discovered in that remark of his, which at the time of uttering it had appeared to him a simple platitude. It went exceedingly deep in many directions.

"I hope you are right," she replied. Her voice shook.

v

There was silence. To ease the strain of his self-consciousness Edwin stepped down from the stone floor of the porch to the garden. He felt rain. And he noticed that the sky was very much darker.

"By Jove!" he said. "It's beginning to rain, I do believe."

"I thought it would," she answered.

A squall of wind suddenly surged rustling through the high trees in the garden of the Orgreaves, and the next instant threw a handful of wild raindrops on his cheek.

"You'd better stand against the other wall," he suggested. "You'll catch it there, if it keeps on."

She obeyed. He returned to the porch, but remained in the exposed portion of it.

"Better come here," she said, indicating somehow her side.

"Oh! I'm all right."

"You needn't be afraid of me," she snapped.

He grinned awkwardly, but said nothing, for he could not express his secret resentment. He considered the girl to be of exceedingly unpleasant manners.

"Would you mind telling me the time?" she asked.

He took out his watch, but peer as he might, he could not discern the position of the hands.

"Half a second," he said, and struck a match. The match was blown out before he could look at the dial, but by its momentary flash he saw Hilda, pressed against the wall. Her lips were tight, her eyes blazing, her hands clenched. She frowned; she was pale, and especially pale by contrast with the black of her plain austere dress.

"If you'll come into the house," he said, "I can get a light there." The door was ajar.

"No thanks," she declined. "It doesn't really matter what time it is, does it? Good night!"

He divined that she was offering her hand. He clasped it blindly in the dark. He could not refuse to shake hands. Her hand gave him a feverish and lingering squeeze, which was like a contradicting message in the dark night; as though she were sending through her hand a secret denial of her spoken accents and her frown. He forgot to answer her 'good night.' A trap rattled furiously up the road. (Yes; only six yards off, on the other side of the boundary wall, was the public road! And he standing hidden there in the porch with this girl whom he had seen for the first time that evening!) It was the mail-cart, rushing to Knype.

She did not move. She had said 'good night' and shaken hands; and yet she remained. They stood speechless.

Then without warning, after perhaps a minute that seemed like ten minutes, she walked away, slowly, into the rain. And as she did so, Edwin could just see her straightening her spine and throwing back her shoulders with a proud gesture.

"I say, Miss Lessways!" he called in a low voice. But he

had no notion of what he wanted to say. Only her departure had unlocked his throat.

She made no sign. Again he grinned awkwardly, a little ashamed of her and a little ashamed of himself, because neither had behaved as woman or man of the world.

After a short interval he followed in her steps as far as the gap in the hedge, which he did not find easily. There was no sign of her. The gas burned serenely in her bedroom, and the window was open. Then he saw the window close up a little, and an arm in front of the drawn blind. The rain had apparently ceased.

VI

"Well, that's an eye-opener, that is!" he murmured, and thereby expressed the situation. "Of all the damned impudence . . . !" He somewhat overstated his feelings because he was posing a little to himself: an accident that sooner or later happens to every man! "And she'll go back and make out to Master Tom that she's just had a stroll in the garden! . . . Garden, indeed! And yet they're all so fearfully stuck on her."

He nodded his head several times reflectively, as if saying, "Well, well! What next?" And he murmured aloud: "So that's how they carry on, is it!" He meant, of course, women. . . . He was very genuinely astounded.

But the chief of all his acute sensations in that moment was pride: sheer pride. He thought, what ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have thought in such circumstances: "She's taken a fancy to me!" Useless to call him a conceited coxcomb, from disgust that he did not conform to a sentimentally idealistic standard! He thought: "She's taken a fancy to me!" And he was not a conceited coxcomb. He exulted in the thought. Nothing had ever before so startled and uplifted him. It constituted the supreme experience of his career as a human being. The delightful and stimulating experience of his evening in the house of the Orgreaves sank into unimportance by the side of it. The new avenues towards joy which had been revealed to him appeared now to be quite unexciting paths; he took them for granted. And he forgot the high and serious mood of complex emotion

in which he had entered the new house. Music and the exotic flavours of a foreign language seemed a little thing, in comparison with the feverish hand-clasp of the girl whom he so peculiarly disliked. The lifeless hand which he had taken in the drawing-room of the Orgreaves could not be the same hand as that which had closed intimately on his under the porch. She must have two right hands!

And, even more base than his coxcombry, he despised her because it was he, Edwin, to whom she had taken a fancy. He had not sufficient self-confidence to justify her fancy in his own eyes. His argument actually was that no girl worth having could have taken a fancy to him at sight. Thus he condemned her for her faith in him. As for his historic remark about belief,—well, there might or might not be something in that; perhaps there was something in it. One instant he admired it, and the next he judged it glib and superficial. Moreover, he had conceivably absorbed it from a book. But even if it were an original epigrammatic pearl—was that an adequate reason for her following him to an empty house at dead of night? Of course, an overwhelming passion *might* justify such behaviour! He could recall cases in literature. . . . Yes, he had got so far as to envisage the possibility of overwhelming passion. . . . Then all these speculations disconcertingly vanished, and Hilda presented herself to his mind as a girl intensely religious, who would shrink from no unconventionality in the pursuit of truth. He did not much care for this theory of Hilda, nor did it convince him.

"Imagine marrying a girl like that!" he said to himself disdainfully. And he made a catalogue of her defects of person and of character. She was severe, satiric, merciless. "And I suppose—if I were to put my finger up—!—" Thus ran on his despicable ideas. "Janet Orgreave, now—!" Janet had every quality that he could desire, that he could even think of. Janet was balm.

"You needn't be afraid," that unpleasant girl had said. And he had only been able to grin in reply!

Still, pride! Intense masculine pride!

There was one thing he had liked about her: that straightening of the spine and setting back of the shoulders as she left him. She had in her some tinge of the heroic.

He quitted the garden, and as soon as he was in the street he remembered that he had not pulled-to the garden door of the house. "Dash the confounded thing!" he exploded, returning. But he was not really annoyed. He would not have been really annoyed even if he had had to return from half-way down Trafalgar Road. Everything was a trifle save that a girl had run after him under such romantic circumstances. The circumstances were not strictly romantic, but they so seemed to him.

Going home, he did not meet a soul; only in the middle distance of one of the lower side-streets he espied a policeman. Trafalgar Road was a solitude of bright and forlorn gas-lamps and dark, excluding façades.

Suddenly he came to the corner of Wedgwood Street. He had started from Bleakridge; he had arrived at home: the interval between these two events was a perfect blank, save for the policeman. He could not recall having walked all the way down the road. And as he put the key into the door he was not in the least disturbed by the thought that his father might not have gone to bed. He went upstairs with a certain swaggering clatter, as who should say to all sleepers and bullies: "You be damned! I don't care for any of you! Something's happened to me."

And he mused: "If anybody had told me this afternoon that before midnight I should——"

CHAPTER X

THE CENTENARY

I

IT was immediately after this that the "Centenary"—mispronounced in every manner conceivable—began to obsess the town. Superior and aloof persons, like the Orgreaves, had for weeks heard a good deal of vague talk about the Centenary from people whom intellectually they despised, and had condescended to the Centenary as an amiable and excusable affair which lacked interest for them. They were wrong. Edwin had gone further, and had sniffed at the Centenary, to everybody except his father. And Edwin was especially wrong. On the antepenultimate day of June he first uneasily suspected that he had committed a fault of appraisement. That was when his father brusquely announced that by request of the Mayor all places of business in the town would be closed in honour of the Centenary. It was the Centenary of the establishment of Sunday schools.

Edwin hated Sunday schools. Nay, he venomously resented them, though they had long ceased to incommode him. They were connected in his memory with atrocious tedium, pietistic insincerity, and humiliating contacts. At the bottom of his mind he still regarded them as a malicious device of parents for wilfully harassing and persecuting in-offensive, helpless children. And he had a particular grudge against them because he alone of his father's offspring had been chosen for the nauseating infliction. Why should his sisters have been spared and he doomed? He became really impatient when Sunday schools were under discussion, and from mere irrational annoyance he would not admit that Sunday schools had any good qualities whatever. He knew nothing of their history, and wished to know nothing.

Nevertheless, when the day of the Centenary dawned—and

dawned in splendour—he was compelled, even within himself, to treat Sunday schools with more consideration. And, in fact, for two or three days previously the gathering force of public opinion had been changing his attitude from stern hatred to a sort of half-hearted derision. Now, the derision was mysteriously transformed into an inimical respect. By what? By he knew not what. By something without a name in the air which the mind breathes. He felt it at six o'clock, ere he arose. Lying in bed he felt it. The day was to be a festival. The shop would not open, nor the printing office. The work of preparing for the removal would be suspended. The way of daily life would be quite changed. He was free—that was, nearly free. He said to himself that of course his excited father would expect him to witness the celebrations and to wear his best clothes, and that was a bore. But therein he was not quite honest. For he secretly wanted to witness the celebrations and to wear his best clothes. His curiosity was hungry. He admitted, what many had been asserting for weeks, that the Centenary was going to be a big thing; and his social instinct wished him to share in the pride of it.

“It’s a grand day!” exclaimed his father, cheerful and all glossy, as he looked out upon Duck Square before breakfast. “It’ll be rare and hot!” And it was a grand day; one of the dazzling spectacular blue-and-gold days of early summer. And Maggie was in finery. And Edwin too! Useless for him to pretend that a big thing was not afoot—and his father in a white waistcoat! Breakfast was positively talkative, though the conversation was naught but a repeating and repeating of what the arrangements were, and of what everybody had decided to do. The three lingered over breakfast, because there was no reason to hurry. And then even Maggie left the sitting-room without a care, for though Clara was coming for dinner Mrs. Nixon could be trusted. Mrs. Nixon, if she had time, would snatch half an hour in the afternoon to see what remained to be seen of the show. Families must eat. And if Mrs. Nixon was stopped by duty from assisting at this Centenary, she must hope to be more at liberty for the next.

II

At nine o'clock, in a most delicious mood of idleness, Edwin strolled into the shop. His father had taken down one shutter from the doorway, and slanted it carelessly against another on the pavement. A blind man or a drunkard might have stumbled against it and knocked it over. The letters had been hastily opened. Edwin could see them lying in disorder on the desk in the little office. The dust-sheets thought the day was Sunday. He stood in the narrow aperture and looked forth. Duck Square was a shimmer of sunshine. The Dragon and the Duck and the other public-house at the top corner seemed as usual, stolidly confident in the thirst of populations. But the Borough Dining Rooms, next door but one to the corner of Duck Square and Wedgwood Street, were not as usual. The cart of Doy, the butcher, had halted laden in front of the Borough Dining Rooms, and the anxious proprietor, attended by his two little daughters (aproned and sleeved for hard work in imitation of their stout, perspiring mother), was accepting unusual joints from it. Ticklish weather for meat—you could see that from the man's gestures. Even on ordinary days those low-ceiled dining-rooms, stretching far back from the street in a complicated vista of interiors, were apt to be crowded; for the quality of the eightpenny dinner could be relied upon. Edwin imagined what a stifling, deafening inferno of culinary odours and clatter they would be at one o'clock, at two o'clock.

Three hokey-pokey ice-cream hand-carts, one after another, turned the corner of Trafalgar Road and passed in front of him along Wedgwood Street. Three! The men pushing them, one an Italian, seemed to wear nothing but shirt and trousers, with a straw hat above and vague slippers below. The steam-car lumbered up out of the valley of the road and climbed Duck Bank, throwing its enormous shadow to the left. It was half full of bright frocks and suits. An irregular current of finery was setting in to the gates of the Wesleyan School yard at the top of the Bank. And ceremoniously bedecked individuals of all ages hurried in this direction and in that, some with white handkerchiefs over flowered hats, a few beneath parasols. All the town's store of Sunday clothes was

in use. The humblest was crudely gay. Pawnbrokers had full tills and empty shops, for twenty-four hours.

Then a procession appeared, out of Moorthorne Road, from behind the Wesleyan Chapel-keeper's house. And as it appeared it burst into music. First a purple banner, upheld on crimson poles with gilded lance-points ; then a brass band in full note ; and then children, children, children—little, middling, and big. As the procession curved down into Trafalgar Road, it grew in stature, until, towards the end of it, the children were as tall as the adults who walked fussily as hens, proudly as peacocks, on its flank. And last came a railway lorry on which dozens of tiny infants had been penned ; and the horses of the lorry were ribboned and their manes and tails tightly plaited ; on that grand day they could not be allowed to protect themselves against flies ; they were sacrificial animals.

A power not himself drew Edwin to the edge of the pavement. He could read on the immense banner : " Moorthorne St. John's Sunday School." These, then, were church folk. And indeed the next moment he descried a curate among the peacocks. The procession made another curve into Wedgwood Street, on its way to the supreme rendezvous in St. Luke's Square. The band blared ; the crimson cheeks of the trumpeters sucked in and out ; the drummer leaned backwards to balance his burden, and banged. Every soul of the variegated company, big and little, was in a perspiration. The staggering bearers of the purple banner, who held the great poles in leathern sockets slung from the shoulders, and their acolytes before and behind who kept the banner upright by straining at crimson halyards, sweated most of all. Every foot was grey with dust, and the dark trousers of boys and men showed dust. The steamy whiff of humanity struck Edwin's nostrils. Up hill and down dale the procession had already walked over two miles. Yet it was alert, joyous, and expectant : a chattering procession. From the lorry rose a continuous faint shriek of infantile voices. Edwin was saddened as by pathos. I believe that as he gazed at the procession wagging away along Wedgwood Street he saw Sunday schools in a new light.

And that was the opening of the day. There were to be

dozens of such processions. Some would start only in the town itself ; but others were coming from the villages like Red Cow, five sultry miles off.

III

A young woman under a sunshade came slowly along Wedgwood Street. She was wearing a certain discreet amount of finery, but her clothes did not fit well, and a thin mantle was arranged so as to lessen as much as possible the obviousness of the fact that she was about to become a mother. The expression of her face was discontented and captious. Edwin did not see her until she was close upon him, and then he immediately became self-conscious and awkward.

" Hello, Clara ! " he greeted her, with his instinctive warm, transient smile, holding out his hand sheepishly. It was a most extraordinary and amazing thing that he could never regard the ceremony of shaking hands with a relative as other than an affectation of punctilio. Happily he was not wearing his hat ; had it been on his head he would never have taken it off, and yet would have cursed himself for not doing so.

" We *are* grand ! " exclaimed Clara, limply taking his hand and dropping it as an article of no interest. In her voice there was still some echo of former sprightliness. The old Clara in her had not till that moment beheld the smart and novel curves of Edwin's Shillitoe suit, and the satiric cry came unbidden from her heart.

Edwin gave an uneasy laugh, which was merely the outlet for his disgust. Not that he was specially disgusted with Clara, for indeed marriage had assuaged a little the tediousness of some of her mannerisms, even if it had taken away from her charm. He was disgusted more comprehensively by the tradition, universal in his class and in most classes, according to which relatives could not be formally polite to one another. He obeyed the tradition as slavishly as anyone, but often said to himself that he would violate the sacred rule if only he could count on a suitable response ; he knew that he could not count on a suitable response ; and he had no mind to be in the excruciating position of one who, having started " God save the Queen " at a meeting, finds himself alone in the song. Why could not he and Clara

behave together, as, for instance, he and Janet Orgreave would behave together, with dignity, with worldliness, with mutual deference? But no! It was impossible, and would ever be so. They had been too brutally intimate, and the result was irremediable.

"*She's* got no room to talk about personal appearance, anyway!" he thought sardonically.

There was another extraordinary and amazing thing. He was ashamed of her condition! He could not help the feeling. In vain he said to himself that her condition was natural and proper. In vain he remembered the remark of the sage that a young woman in her condition was the most beautiful sight in the world. He was ashamed of it. And he did not think it beautiful; he thought it ugly. It worried him. What,—his sister? Other men's sisters, yes; but his! He forgot that he himself had been born. He could scarcely bear to look at Clara. Her face was thin and changed in colour; her eyes were unnaturally lustrous and large, bold and fatigued; she looked ill, really ill; and she was incredibly unornamental. And this was she whom he could remember as a graceful child! And it was all perfectly correct and even laudable! So much so that young Clara undoubtedly looked down, now, as from a superior height, upon both himself and Maggie!

"Where's father?" she asked. "Just shut my sunshade."

"Oh! Somewhere about. I expect he'll be along in a minute. Albert coming?" He followed her into the shop.

"Albert!" she protested, shocked. "Albert can't possibly come till one o'clock. Didn't you know he's one of the principal stewards in St. Luke's Square? He says we aren't to wait dinner for him if he isn't prompt."

"Oh!" Edwin replied, and put the sunshade on the counter.

Clara sat down heavily on a chair, and began to fan herself with a handkerchief. In spite of the heat of exercise her face was of a pallid yellow.

"I suppose you're going to stay here all morning?" Edwin inquired.

"Well," said Clara, "you don't see me walking up and down the streets all morning, do you? Albert said I was to be

sure and go upstairs at once and not move. He said there'd be plenty to see for a long time yet from the sitting-room window, and then afterwards I could lie down."

Albert said ! Albert said ! Clara's intonation of this frequent phrase always jarred on Edwin. It implied that Albert was the supreme fount of wisdom and authority in Bursley. Whereas to Edwin, Albert was in fact a mere tedious, self-important manufacturer in a small way, with whom he had no ideas in common. "A decent fellow at bottom," the fastidious Edwin was bound to admit to himself by reason of slight glimpses which he had had of Albert's uncouth good-nature ; but pietistic, overbearing, and without humour.

"Where's Maggie ?" Clara demanded.

"I think she's putting her things on," said Edwin.

"But didn't she understand I was coming early ?" Clara's voice was querulous, and she frowned.

"I don't know," said Edwin.

He felt that if they remained together for hours, he and Clara would never rise above this plane of conversation—personal, factual, perfectly devoid of wide interest. They would never reach an exchange of general ideas ; they never had done. He did not think that Clara had any general ideas.

"I hear you're getting frightfully thick with the Orgreaves," Clara observed, with a malicious accent and smile, as if to imply that he was getting frightfully above himself, and—simultaneously—that the Orgreaves were after all no better than other people.

"Who told you that ?" He walked towards the doorway uneasily. The worst was that he could not successfully pretend that these sisterly attacks were lost on him.

"Never mind who told me," said Clara.

Her voice took on a sudden charming roguish quality, and he could hear again the girl of fourteen. His heart at once softened to her. The impartial and unmoved spectator that sat somewhere in Edwin, as in everybody who possesses artistic sensibility, watching his secret life as from a conning tower, thought how strange this was. He stared out into the street. And then a face appeared at the aperture left by the removed

shutter. It was Janet Orgreave's, and it hesitated. Edwin gave a nervous start.

IV

Janet was all in white again, and her sunshade was white, with regular circular holes in it to let through spots of sunlight which flecked her face. Edwin had not recovered from the blow of her apparition just at that moment, when he saw Hilda Lessways beyond her. Hilda was slate-coloured, and had a black sunshade. His heart began to thump; it might have been a dramatic and dangerous crisis that had suddenly come about. And to Edwin the situation did in fact present itself as critical: his sister behind, and these two so different girls in front. Yet there was nothing critical in it whatsoever. He shook hands as in a dream, wondering what he should do, trying to summon out of himself the man of the world.

"Do come in," he urged them, hoping they would refuse.

"Oh no. We mustn't come in," said Janet, smiling gratefully. Hilda did not smile; she had not even smiled in shaking hands; and she had shaken hands without conviction.

Edwin heard a hurried step in the shop, and then the voice of Maggie, maternal and protective, in a low exclamation of surprise: "You, dear!" And then the sound of a smacking kiss, and Clara's voice, thin, weak, and confiding: "Yes, I've come." "Come upstairs, do!" said Maggie imploringly. "Come and be comfortable." Then steps, ceasing to be heard as the sisters left the shop at the back. The solicitude of Maggie for Clara during the last few months had seemed wonderful to Edwin, as also Clara's occasional childlike acceptance of it.

"But you must come in!" he said more boldly to the visitors, asking himself whether either Janet or Hilda had caught sight of his sisters in the gloom of the shop.

They entered, Hilda stiffly. Each with the same gesture closed her parasol before passing through the slit between the shutters into the deep shade. But whereas Janet smiled with pleasant anticipation as though she was going into heaven,

Hilda wrinkled her forehead when her parasol would not subside at the first touch.

Janet talked of the Centenary ; said they had decided only that morning to come down into the town and see whatever was to be seen ; said with an angelic air of apologizing to the Centenary that up at Lane End House they had certainly been under-estimating its importance and its interest as a spectacle ; said that it was most astonishing to see all the shops closed. And Edwin interjected vague replies, pulling the chair out of the little ebonized cubicle so that they could both sit down. And Hilda remained silent. And Edwin's thoughts were diving darkly beneath Janet's chatter as in a deep sea beneath light waves. He heard and answered Janet with a minor part of his being that functioned automatically.

"She's a caution !" reflected the main Edwin, obsessed in secret by Hilda Lessways. Who could have guessed, by looking at her, that only three evenings before she had followed him in the night to question him, to squeeze his hand, and to be rude to him ? Did Janet know ? Did anyone ? No ! He felt sure that he and she had the knowledge of that interview to themselves. She sat down glum, almost glowering. She was no more worldly than Maggie and Clara were worldly. Than they, she had no more skill to be sociable. And in appearance she was scarcely more stylish. But she was not as they, and it was useless vindictively to disparage her by pretending that she was. She could be passionate concerning Victor Hugo. She was capable of disturbing herself about the abstract question of belief. He had not heard her utter a single word in the way of common girlish conversation.

The doubt again entered his mind whether indeed her visit to the porch of the new house had been due to a genuine interest in abstract questions and not to a fancy for himself. "Yes," he reflected, "that must have been it."

In two days his pride in the affair had lost its first acuteness, though it had continued to brighten every moment of his life, and though he had not ceased to regret that he had no intimate friend to whom he could recount it in solemn and delicious intimacy. Now, philosophically, he stamped on his pride as on a fire. And he affected to be relieved at the decision that the girl had been moved by naught but a sort of fanaticism.

But he was not relieved by the decision. The decision itself was not genuine. He still clung to the notion that she had followed him for himself. He preferred that she should have taken a fancy to him, even though he discovered no charm in her, no beauty, no solace, nothing but matter for repulsion. He wanted her to think of him, in spite of his distaste for her ; to think of him hopelessly. " You are an ass ! " murmured the impartial watcher in the conning tower. And he was. But he did not care. It was agreeable thus to be an ass. . . . His pride flared up again, and instead of stamping he blew on it.

" By Jove ! " he thought, eyeing her slyly, " I'll make you show your hand—you see if I don't ! You think you can play with me, but you can't ! " He was as violent against her as if she had done him an injury instead of having squeezed his hand in the dark. Was it not injurious to have snapped at him, when he refused her invitation to stand by her against the wall in the porch, " You needn't be afraid " ? Janet would never have said such a thing. If only she resembled Janet . . . !

During all this private soliloquizing, Edwin's mien of mild nervousness never hardened to betray his ferocity, and he said nothing that might not have been said by an innocuous idiot.

The paper boy, arrayed richly, slipped apologetically into the shop. He had certain packets to take out for delivery, and he was late. Edwin nodded to him distantly. The conversation languished.

Then the head of Mr. Orgreave appeared in the aperture. The architect seemed amused. Edwin could not understand how he had ever stood in awe of Mr. Orgreave, who, with all his distinction and expensiveness, was the most companionable person in the world.

" Oh ! Father ! " cried Janet. " What a deceitful thing you are ! Do you know, Mr. Edwin, he pooh-poohed us coming down : he said he was far too busy for such childish things as Centenaries ! And look at him ! "

Mr. Orgreave, whose suit, hat, and neck-tie were a harmony of elegant greys, smiled with paternal ease, and swung his cane. " Come along, now ! Don't let's miss anything. Come along. Now, Edwin, you're coming, aren't you ? "

"Did you ever see such a child?" murmured Janet, adoring him.

Edwin turned to the paper boy. "Just find my father before you go," he commanded. "Tell him I've gone, and ask him if you are to put the shutter up." The paper boy respectfully promised obedience. And Edwin was glad that the forbidding Hilda was there to witness his authority.

Janet went out first. Hilda hesitated; and Edwin, having taken his hat from its hook in the cubicle, stood attending her at the aperture. He was sorry that he could not run upstairs for a walking-stick. At last she seemed to decide to leave, yet left with apparent reluctance. Edwin followed, giving a final glance at the boy, who was tying a parcel hurriedly. Mr. Orgreave and his daughter were ten yards off arm-in-arm. Edwin fell into step with Hilda Lessways. Janet looked round and smiled and beckoned. "I wonder," said Edwin to himself, "what the devil's going to happen now? I'll take my oath she stayed behind on purpose! Well. . . ." This swaggering audacity was within. Without, even a skilled observer could have seen nothing but a faint, sheepish smile. And his heart was thumping again.

CHAPTER XI

THE BOTTOM OF THE SQUARE

I

ANOTHER procession—that of the Old Church Sunday school—came up, with standards floating and drums beating, out of the steepness of Woodisun Bank, and turned into Wedgwood Street, which thenceforward was loosely thronged by procession and sightseers. The importance of the festival was now quite manifest, for at the end of the street could be seen St. Luke's Square, massed with human beings in movement. Osmond Orgreave and his daughter were lost to view in the brave crowd; but after a little, Edwin distinctly saw Janet's sunshade leave Wedgwood Street at the corner of the Wedgwood Institution and bob slowly into the Cock Yard, which was a narrow thoroughfare leading to the market-place and the Town Hall, and so to the top of St. Luke's Square. He said nothing, and kept straight on along Wedgwood Street past the Covered Market.

"I hope you didn't catch cold in the rain the other night," he remarked—grimly, as he thought.

"I should have thought it would have been you who were more likely to catch cold," Hilda replied, in her curt manner. She looked in front of her. The words seemed to him to carry a double meaning. Suddenly she moved her head, glanced full at him for an instant, and glanced behind her. "Where are they?" she inquired.

"The others? Aren't they in front? They must be somewhere about."

Unless she also had marked their deviation into the Cock Yard, why had she glanced behind her in asking where they were? She knew as well as he that they had started in front. He could only deduce that she had been as willing as himself

to lose Mr. Orgreave and Janet. Just then an acquaintance raised his hat to Edwin in acknowledgment of the lady's presence, and he responded with pride. Whatever his private attitude to Hilda, he was undeniably proud to be seen in the streets with a disdainful, aloof girl unknown to the town. It was an experience entirely new to him, and it flattered him. He desired to look long at her face, to examine her expression, to make up his mind about her; but he could not, because they were walking side by side. The sole manifestation of her that he could judge was her voice. It was a remarkable voice, rather deep, with a sort of chiselled intonation. The cadences of it fell on the ear softly and yet ruthlessly, and when she had finished speaking you became aware of silence, as after a solemn utterance of destiny. What she happened to have been saying seemed to be immaterial to the effect, which was physical, vibratory.

II

At the border of St. Luke's Square, junction of eight streets, true centre of the town's traffic, and the sole rectangular open space enclosed completely by shops, they found a line of constables which yielded only to processions and to the bearers of special rosettes. 'The Square,' as it was called by those who inhabited it, had been chosen for the historic scene of the day because of its pre-eminent claim and suitability; the least of its advantages—its slope, from the top of which it could be easily dominated by a speaker on a platform—would alone have secured for it the honours of the Centenary.

As the police cordon closed on the procession from the Old Church, definitely dividing the spectators from the spectacle, it grew clear that the spectators were in the main a shabby lot; persons without any social standing: unkempt idlers, good-for-nothings, wastrels, clay-whitened pot-girls who had to work even on that day, and who had run out for a few moments in their flannel aprons to stare, and a few score ragamuffins, whose parents were too poor or too careless to make them superficially presentable enough to figure in a procession. Nearly the whole respectability of the town was either fussily marshalling processions or gazing down at them

in comfort from the multitudinous open windows of the Square. The 'leads' over the projecting windows of Baines's, the chief draper's, were crowded with members of the ruling caste.

And even within the Square, it could be seen, between the towering backs of constables, that the spectacle itself was chiefly made up of indigence bedecked. The thousands of perspiring children, penned like sheep, and driven to and fro like sheep by anxious and officious rosettes, nearly all had the air of poverty decently putting the best face on itself; they were nearly all, beneath their vague sense of importance, wistful with the resigned fatalism of the young and of the governed. They knew not precisely why they were there; but merely that they had been commanded to be there, and that they were hot and thirsty, and that for weeks they had been learning hymns by heart for this occasion, and that the occasion was glorious. Many of the rosettes themselves had a poor, driven look. None of these bought suits at Shillitoe's, nor millinery at Baines's. None of them gave orders for printing, nor had preferences in the form of ledgers, nor held views on Victor Hugo, nor drank wine, nor yearned for perfection in the art of social intercourse. To Edwin, who was just beginning to touch the planes of worldliness and of dilettantism in art, to Edwin, with the mysterious and haughty creature at his elbow, they seemed to have no more in common with himself and her than animals had. And he wondered by virtue of what decree he, in the Shillitoe suit, and the grand house waiting for him up at Bleakridge, had been lifted up to splendid ease above the squalid and pitiful human welter.

III

Such musings were scarcely more than subconscious in him. He stood now a few inches behind Hilda, and, above these thoughts, and beneath the stir and strident glitter and noise of the crawling ant-heap, his mind was intensely occupied with Hilda's ear and her nostril. He could watch her now at leisure, for the changeful interest of the scene made conversation unnecessary and even inept. What a lobe! What a nostril! Every curve of her features seemed to express a fine arrogant

acrimony and harsh truculence. At any rate she was not half alive; she was alive in every particle of herself. She gave off antipathies as a liquid gives off vapour. Moods passed across her intent face like a wind over a field. Apparently she was so rapt as to be unaware that her sunshade was not screening her. Sadness prevailed among her moods.

The mild Edwin said secretly:

"By Jove! If I had you to myself, my lady, I'd soon teach you a thing or two!" He was quite sincere, too.

His glance, roving, discovered Mrs. Hamps above him, ten feet over his head, at the corner of the Baines balcony. He flushed, for he perceived that she must have been waiting to catch him. She was at her most stately and most radiant, wonderful in lavender, and she poured out on him the full opulence of a proud recognition.

Everybody should be made aware that Mrs. Hamps was greeting her adored nephew, who was with a lady friend of the Orgreaves.

She leaned slightly from her cane chair.

"Isn't it a beautiful sight?" she cried. Her voice sounded thin and weak against the complex din of the Square.

He nodded, smiling.

"Oh! I think it's a beautiful sight!" she cried once more, ecstatic. People turned to see whom she was addressing.

But though he nodded again he did not think it was a beautiful sight. He thought it was a disconcerting sight, a sight vexatious and troublesome. And he was in no way tranquillized by the reflection that every town in England had the same sight to show at that hour.

And moreover, anticipating their next interview, he could, in fancy, plainly hear his Aunt Clara saying, with hopeless, longing benignancy: "Oh, Edwin, how I *do* wish I could have seen you in the Square, bearing your part!"

Hilda seemed to be oblivious of Mrs. Hamps's ejaculations, but immediately afterwards she straightened her back, with a gesture that Edwin knew, and staring into his eyes said, as it were resentfully—

"Well, they evidently aren't here!"

And looked with scorn among the sightseers. It was clear

that the crowd contained nobody of the rank and stamp of the Orgreaves.

"They may have gone up the Cock Yard—if you know where that is," said Edwin.

"Well, don't you think we'd better find them somehow?"

CHAPTER XII

THE TOP OF THE SQUARE

I

IN making the detour through the Cock Yard to reach St. Luke's Square again at the top of it, the only members of the Orgreave clan whom they encountered were Jimmie and Johnnie, who, on hearing of the disappearance of their father and Janet, merely pointed out that their father and Janet were notoriously always getting themselves lost, owing to gross carelessness about whatever they happened to be doing. The youths then departed, saying that the Bursley show was nothing, and that they were going to Hanbridge; they conveyed the idea that Hanbridge was the only place in the world for self-respecting men of fashion. But before leaving they informed Edwin that a fellow at the corner of the Square was letting out rather useful barrels on lease. This fellow proved to be an odd-jobman who had been discharged from the Duke of Wellington Vaults in the market-place for consistently intemperate language, but whose tongue was such that he had persuaded the landlord on this occasion to let him borrow a dozen stout empty barrels, and the police to let him dispose them on the pavement. Every barrel was occupied, and, perceiving this, Edwin at once became bold with the barrel-man. He did not comfortably fancy himself perched prominent on a barrel with Hilda Lessways by his side, but he could enjoy talking about it, and he wished to show Hilda that he could be as dashing as those young sparks, Jimmie and Johnnie.

"Now, mester!" shouted the barrel-man thickly, in response to Edwin's airy remark, "these 'ere two chaps 'll shunt off for th' price of a quart!" He indicated a couple of barrel-tenants of his own tribe, who instantly jumped down, touching their soiled caps. They were part of the barrel-

man's machinery for increasing profits. Edwin could not withdraw. His very cowardice forced him to be audacious. By the time he had satisfied the clawing greed of three dirty hands, the two barrels had cost him a shilling. Hilda's only observation was, as Edwin helped her to the plateau of the barrel: "I do wish they wouldn't spit on their money." All barrels being now let to *bona fide* tenants and paid for, the three men sidled hastily away in order to drink luck to Sunday schools in the Duke of Wellington's Entire. And Edwin, mounting the barrel next to Hilda's, was thinking: "I've been done over that job. I ought to have got them for sixpence." He saw how expensive it was, going about with delicately nurtured women. Never would he have offered a barrel to Maggie, and even had he done so Maggie would assuredly have said that she could make shift well enough without one.

"It's simply perfect for seeing," exclaimed Hilda, as he achieved her altitude. Her tone was almost cordial. He felt surprisingly at ease.

II

The whole Square was now suddenly revealed as a swarming mass of heads, out of which rose banners and pennons that were cruder in tint even than the frocks and hats of the little girls and the dresses and bonnets of their teachers; the men, too, by their neck-ties, scarves, and rosettes, added colour to colour. All the windows were chromatic with the hues of bright costumes, and from many windows and from every roof that had a flagstaff, flags waved heavily against the gorgeous sky. At the bottom of the Square the lorries with infants had been arranged, and each looked like a bank of variegated flowers. The principal bands—that is to say, all the bands that could be trusted—were collected round the red baize platform at the top of the Square, and the vast sun-reflecting euphoniums, trumpets, and cornets made a glittering circle about the officials and ministers and their wives and women. All denominations, for one day only, fraternized effusively together on that platform; for princes of the royal house, and the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lord Mayor of London had urged that it should be so. The

Primitive Methodists' parson discovered himself next but one to Father Milton, who on any other day would have been a Popish priest, and whose wooden substitute for a wife was the queen on a chess-board. And on all these the sun blazed torridly.

And almost in the middle of the Square an immense purple banner bellied in the dusty breeze, saying in large gold letters, "The Blood of the Lamb," together with the name of some Sunday school, which Edwin from his barrel could not decipher.

Then a hoary white-tied notability on the platform raised his right arm very high, and a bugle called, and a voice that had filled fields in exciting times of religious revival floated in thunder across the enclosed Square, easily dominating it—

"Let us sing."

And the conductor of the eager massed bands set them free with a gesture, and after they had played a stave, a small stentorian choir at the back of the platform broke forth, and in a moment the entire multitude, at first raggedly, but soon in good unison, was singing—

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure:
Cleanse from guilt and make me pure.

The volume of sound was overwhelming. Its crashing force was enough to sweep people from barrels. Edwin could feel moisture in his eyes, and he dared not look at Hilda. "Why the deuce do I want to cry?" he asked himself angrily, and was ashamed. And at the beginning of the second verse, when the glittering instruments blared forth anew, and the innumerable voices, high and loud, infantile and aged, flooded swiftly over their brassy notes, subduing them, the effect on Edwin was the same again: a tightening of the throat, and a squeezing down of the eyelids. Why was it? Through a mist he read the words "The Blood of the Lamb," and he could picture the riven trunk of a man dying, and a torrent of blood flowing therefrom, and people like his Auntie Clara and his brother-in-law Albert plunging ecstatically into the liquid in order to

be white. The picture came again in the third verse,—the red fountains and the frantic bathers.

Then the notability raised his arm once more, and took off his hat, and all the males on the platform took off their hats, and presently every boy and man in the Square had uncovered his head to the strong sunshine ; and at last Edwin had to do the same, and only the policemen, by virtue of their high office, could dare to affront the majesty of God. And the reverberating voice cried—

“ Oh, most merciful Lord ! Have pity upon us. We are brands plucked from the burning.” And continued for several minutes to descant upon the theme of everlasting torture by incandescence and thirst. Nominally addressing a deity, but in fact preaching to his audience, he announced that, even for the veriest infant on a lorry, there was no escape from the eternal fires save by complete immersion in the blood. And he was so convinced and convincing that an imaginative nose could have detected the odour of burnt flesh. And all the while the great purple banner waved insistently : “ The Blood of the Lamb.”

III

When the prayer was finished for the benefit of the little ones, another old and favourite hymn had to be sung. (None but the classical lyrics of British Christianity had found a place in the programme of the great day.) Guided by the orchestra, the youth of Bursley and the maturity thereof chanted with gusto—

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins ;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood—

Edwin, like everybody, knew every line of the poem. With the purple banner waving there a bloody motto, he foresaw each sanguinary detail of the verse ere it came to him from the shrill childish throats. And a phrase from another hymn jumped from somewhere in his mind just as William Cowper's ended and a speech commenced. The phrase was ‘ India's coral strand.’ In thinking upon it he forgot to listen to the

speech. He saw the flags, banners, and pennons floating in the sunshine and in the heavy breeze ; he felt the reverberation of the tropic sun on his head ; he saw the crowded humanity of the Square attired in its crude, primary colours ; he saw the great brass serpentine instruments gleaming ; he saw the red dais ; he saw, bursting with infancy, the immense cars to which were attached the fantastically plaited horses ; he saw the venerable zealots on the dais raving lest after all the institutions whose centenary they had met to honour should not save these children from hopeless and excruciating torture for ever and ever ; he saw those majestic purple folds in the centre embroidered with the legend of the blood of the mystic Paschal Lamb ; he saw the meek, stupid, and superstitious faces, all turned one way, all for the moment under the empire of one horrible idea, all convinced that the consequences of sins could be prevented by an act of belief, all gloating over inexhaustible tides of blood. And it seemed to him that he was not in England any longer. It seemed to him that in the dim cellars under the shambles behind the Town Hall, where he had once been, there dwelt, squatting, a strange and savage god who would blast all those who did not enter his presence dripping with gore, be they child or grandfather. It seemed to him that the drums were tom-toms, and Baines's a bazaar. He could fit every detail of the scene to harmonize with a vision of India's coral strand.

There was no mist before his eyes now. His sight was so clear that he could distinguish his father at a window of the Bank, at the other top corner of the Square. Part of his mind was so idle that he could wonder how his father had contrived to get there, and whether Maggie was staying at home with Clara. But the visualization of India's coral strand in St. Luke's Square persisted. A phrase in the speech loosed some catch in him, and he turned suddenly to Hilda, and in an intimate half-whisper murmured—

“ More blood ! ”

“ What ? ” she harshly questioned. But he knew that she understood.

“ Well,” he said audaciously, “ look at it ! It only wants the Ganges at the bottom of the Square——”

No one heard save she. But she put her hand on his arm

protestingly. "Even if we don't believe," said she—not harshly, but imploringly, "we needn't make fun."

'We don't believe'! And that new tone of entreaty! She had comprehended without explanation. She was a weird woman. Was there another creature, male or female, to whom he would have dared to say what he had said to her? He had chosen to say it to her because he depised her, because he wished to trample on her feelings. She roused the brute in him, and perhaps no one was more astonished than himself to witness the brute stirring. Imagine saying to the gentle and sensitive Janet: "It only wants the Ganges at the bottom of the Square——" He could not.

They stood silent, gazing and listening. And the sun went higher in the sky and blazed down more cruelly. And then the speech ended, and the speaker wiped his head with an enormous handkerchief. And the multitude, led by the brazen instruments, which in a moment it overpowered, was singing to a solemn air—

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Hilda shook her head.

"What's the matter?" he asked, leaning towards her from his barrel.

"That's the most splendid religious verse ever written!" she said passionately. "You can say what you like. It's worth while believing anything if you can sing words like that and mean them!"

She had an air of restrained fury.

But fancy exciting herself over a hymn!

"Yes, it is fine, that is!" he agreed.

"Do you know who wrote it?" she demanded menacingly.

"I'm afraid I don't remember," he said. The hymn was one of his earliest recollections, but it had never occurred to him to be curious as to its authorship.

Her lips sneered. "Dr. Watts, of course!" she snapped.

He could hear her, beneath the tremendous chanting from the Square, repeating the words to herself with her precise and impressive articulation.

CHAPTER XIII

THE OLDEST SUNDAY-SCHOOL TEACHER

I

FROM the elevation of his barrel Edwin could survey, in the lordly and negligent manner of people on a height, all the detail of his immediate surroundings. Presently, in common with Hilda and the other aristocrats of barrels, he became aware of the increased vivacity of a scene which was passing at a little distance, near a hokey-pokey barrow. The chief actors in the affair appeared to be a young policeman, the owner of the hokey-pokey barrow, and an old man. It speedily grew into one of those episodes which, occurring on the outskirts of some episode immensely greater, draw too much attention to themselves and thereby outrage the sense of proportion residing in most plain men, and especially in most policemen.

"Give him a ha'porth o' hokey," said a derisive voice. "He hasn't got a tooth in his head, but it wants no chewing, hokey does na'." There was a general guffaw from the little rabble about the barrow.

"Aye! Give us some o' that!" said the piping, silly voice of the old man. "But I mun' get to that there platform, I'm telling ye. I'm telling all of ye." He made a senile plunge against the body of the policeman, as against a moveless barricade, and then his hat was awry and it fell off, and somebody lifted it into the air with a neat kick so that it dropped on the barrow. All laughed. The old man laughed.

"Now, old sodger," said the hot policeman curtly. "None o' this! None o' this! I advise ye civilly to be quiet; that's what I advise ye. You can't go on th' platform without a ticket."

"Nay!" piped the old man. "Don't I tell ye I lost it down th' Sytch!"

"And where's yer rosette?"

"Never had any rosette," the old man replied. "I'm th' oldest Sunday-schoo' teacher i' th' Five Towns. Aye! Fifty years and more since I was Super at Turnhill Primitive Sunday schoo', and all Turnhill knows on it. And I've got to get on that there platform. I'm th' oldest Sunday-schoo' teacher i' th' Five Towns. And I was Super——"

Two ribald youngsters intoned 'Super, Super,' and another person unceremoniously jammed the felt hat on the old man's head.

"It's nowt to me if ye was forty Supers," said the policeman, with menacing disdain. "I've got my orders, and I'm not here to knocked about. Where did ye have yer last drink?"

"No wine, no beer, nor spirit-uous liquors have I tasted for sixty-one years come Martinmas," whimpered the old man. And he gave another lurch against the policeman. "My name's Shushions!" And he repeated in a frantic treble, "My name's Shushions!"

"Go and bury thysen, owd gaffer!" a Herculean young collier advised him.

"Why," murmured Hilda, with a sharp frown, "that must be poor old Mr. Shushions from Turnhill, and they're guying him! You must stop it. Something must be done at once."

She jumped down feverishly, and Edwin had to do likewise. He wondered how he should conduct himself so as to emerge creditably from the situation. He felt himself, and had always felt himself, to be the last man in the world capable of figuring with authority in a public altercation. He loathed public altercations. The name of Shushions meant nothing to him; he had forgotten it, if indeed he had ever wittingly heard it. And he did not at first recognize the old man. Descended from the barrel, he was merely an item in the loose-packed crowd. As, in the wake of Hilda, he pushed with false eagerness between stubborn shoulders, he heard the bands striking up again.

II

Approaching, he saw that the old man was very old. And then memory stirred. He began to surmise that he had met the wizened face before, that he knew something about it.

And the face brought up a picture of the shop door and of his father standing beside it, a long time ago. He recalled his last day at school. Yes, of course ! This was the old man named Shushions, some sort of an acquaintance of his father's. This was the old man who had wept a surprising tear at sight of him, Edwin. The incident was so far off that it might have been recorded in history books. He had never seen Mr. Shushions since. And the old man was changed, nearly out of recognition. The old man had lived too long ; he had survived his dignity ; he was now nothing but a bundle of capricious and obstinate instincts set in motion by ancient souvenirs remembered at hazard. The front of his face seemed to have given way in general collapse. The lips were in a hollow ; the cheeks were concave ; the eyes had receded ; and there were pits in the forehead. The pale silvery straggling hairs might have been counted. The wrinkled skin was of a curious brown yellow, and the veins, instead of being blue, were outlined in Indian red. The impression given was that the flesh would be unpleasant and uncanny to the touch. The body was bent, and the neck eternally cricked backward in the effort of the eyes to look up. Moreover, the old man was in a state of neglect. His beard alone proved that. His clothes were dirty and had the air of concealing dirt. And he was dressed with striking oddness. He wore boots that were not a pair. His collar was only fastened by one button, behind ; the ends oscillated like wings ; he had forgotten to fasten them in front ; he had forgotten to put on a neck-tie ; he had forgotten the use of buttons on all his garments. He had grown down into a child again, but Providence had not provided him with a nurse.

Worse than these merely material phenomena was the mumbling toothless gibber of his shrill protesting ; the glassy look of idiocy from his fatigued eyes ; and the inane smile and impotent frown that alternated on his features. He was a horrible and offensive old man. He was Time's obscene victim. Edwin was revolted by the spectacle of the younger men baiting him. He was astonished that they were so short-sighted as not to be able to see the image of themselves in the old man, so imprudent as not to think of their own future, so utterly brutalized. He wanted, by the simple force of

desire, to seclude and shelter the old man, to protect the old man not only from the insults of stupid and crass bullies, but from the old man himself, from his own fatuous senility. He wanted to restore to him, by a benevolent system of pretences, the dignity and the self-respect which he had innocently lost, and so to keep him decent to the eye, if not to the ear, until death came to repair its omission. And it was for his own sake, for the sake of his own image, as much as for the sake of the old man, that he wanted to do this.

III

All that flashed through his mind and heart in a second.

"I know this old gentleman, at least I know him by sight," Hilda was saying to the policeman. "He's very well known in Turnhill as an old Sunday-school teacher, and I'm sure he ought to be on that platform."

Before her eye, and her precise and haughty voice, which had no trace of the local accent, the young policeman was secretly abashed, and the louts fell back sheepishly.

"Yes, he's a friend of my father's,—Mr. Clayhanger, printer," said Edwin, behind her.

The old man stood blinking in the glare.

The policeman, ignoring Hilda, glanced at Edwin, and touched his cap.

"His friends hadn't ought to let him out like this, sir. Just look at him." He sneered, and added: "I'm on point duty. If you ask me, I should say his friends ought to take him home." He said this with a peculiar mysterious emphasis, and looked furtively at the louts for moral support in sarcasm. They encouraged him with grins.

"He must be got on to the platform, somehow," said Hilda, and glanced at Edwin as if counting absolutely on Edwin. "That's what he's come for. I'm sure it means everything to him."

"Aye!" the old man droned. "I was Super when we had to teach 'em their alphabet and give 'em a crust to start with. Many's the man walking about in these towns i' purple and fine raiment as I taught his letters to, and his spellings, aye, and his multiplication table,—in them days!"

"That's all very well, miss," said the policeman, "but who's

going to get him to the platform? He'll be dropping in a sunstroke afore ye can say knife."

"Can't *we*?" She gazed at Edwin appealingly.

"Tak' him into a pub!" growled the collier, audacious.

At the same moment two rosettes bustled up authoritatively. One of them was the burly Albert Benbow. For the first time Edwin was conscious of genuine pleasure at the sight of his brother-in-law. Albert was a born rosette.

"What's all this? What's this? What is it?" he asked sharply. "Hello! What? Mr. Shushions!" He bent down and looked close at the old man. "Where you been, old gentleman?" He spoke loud in his ear. "Everybody's been asking for you. Service is wellnigh over, but ye must come up."

The old man did not appear to grasp the significance of Albert's patronage. Albert turned to Edwin and winked, not only for Edwin's benefit but for that of the policeman, who smiled in a manner that infuriated Edwin.

"Queer old stick!" Albert murmured. "No doing anything with him. He's quarrelled with everybody at Turnhill. That's why he wanted to come to us. And of course we weren't going to refuse the oldest Sunday-school teacher in th' Five Towns. He's a catch. . . . Come along, old gentleman!"

Mr. Shushions did not stir.

"Now, Mr. Shushions," Hilda persuaded him in a voice exquisitely mild, and with a lovely gesture she bent over him. "Let these gentlemen take you up to the platform. That's what you've come for, you know."

The transformation in her amazed Edwin, who could see the tears in her eyes. The tableau of the little, silly old man looking up, and Hilda looking down at him, with her lips parted in a heavenly invitation, and one gloved hand caressing his greenish-black shoulder and the other mechanically holding the parasol aloft,—this tableau was imprinted for ever on Edwin's mind. It was a vision blended in an instant and in an instant dissolved, but for Edwin it remained one of the epochal things of his experience.

Hilda gave Edwin her parasol and quickly fastened Mr. Shushions's collar, and the old man consented to be led off between the two rosettes. The bands were playing the Austrian hymn.

"Like to come up with your young lady friend?" Albert whispered to Edwin importantly as he went.

"Oh no, thanks." Edwin hurriedly smiled.

"Now, old gentleman," he could hear Albert adjuring Mr. Shushions, and he could see him broadly winking to the other rosettes and embracing the yielding crowd in his wink.

Thus was the doddering old fool who had given his youth to Sunday schools when Sunday schools were not patronized by princes, archbishops, and lord mayors, when Sunday schools were the scorn of the intelligent, and had sometimes to be held in public-houses for lack of better accommodation,—thus was he taken off for a show and a museum curiosity by indulgent and shallow Samaritans who had not even the wit to guess that he had sown what they were reaping. And Darius Clayhanger stood oblivious at a high window of the sacred Bank. And Edwin, who, all unconscious, owed the very fact of his existence to the doting imbecile, regarded him chiefly as a figure in a tableau, as the chance instrument of a woman's beautiful revelation. Mr. Shushions's sole crime against society was that he had forgotten to die.

IV

Hilda Lessways would not return to the barrels. She was taciturn, and the only remark which she made bore upon the advisability of discovering Janet and Mr. Orgreave. They threaded themselves out of the moving crowd and away from the hokey-pokey stall and the barrels into the tranquillity of the market-place, where the shadow of the gold angel at the top of the Town Hall spire was a mere squat shapeless stain on the irregular paving-stones. The sound of the Festival came diminished from the Square.

"You're very fond of poetry, aren't you?" Edwin asked her, thinking, among many other things, of her observation upon the verse of Isaac Watts.

"Of course," she replied disagreeably. "I can't imagine anybody wanting to read anything else." She seemed to be ashamed of her kindness to Mr. Shushions, and to wish to efface any impression of amiability that she might have made on Edwin. But she could not have done so.

"Well," he said to himself, "there's no getting over it.

You're the biggest caution I've ever come across!" His condition was one of various agitation.

Then, just as they were passing the upper end of the Cock Yard, which was an archway, Mr. Orgreave and Janet appeared in the archway.

"We've been looking for you everywhere."

"And so have we."

"What have you been doing?"

"What have *you* been doing?"

Father and daughter were gay. They had not seen much, but they were gay. Hilda Lessways and Edwin were not gay, and Hilda would characteristically make no effort to seem that which she was not. Edwin, therefore, was driven by his own diffidence into a nervous light loquacity. He began the tale of Mr. Shushions, and Hilda punctuated it with stabs of phrases.

Mr. Orgreave laughed. Janet listened with eager sympathy.

"Poor old thing! What a shame!" said Janet.

But to Edwin, with the vision of Hilda's mercifulness in his mind, even the sympathy of Janet for Mr. Shushions had a quality of uncomprehending, facile condescension which slightly jarred on him.

The steam-car loitered into view, discharged two passengers, and began to manœuvre for the return journey.

"Oh! Do let's go home by car, father!" cried Janet.

"It's too hot for anything!"

Edwin took leave of them at the car steps. Janet was the smiling incarnation of loving-kindness. Hilda shook hands grudgingly. Through the windows of the car he saw her sternly staring at the advertisements of the interior. He went down the Cock Yard into Wedgwood Street, whence he could hear the bands again and see the pennons. He thought, "This is a funny way of spending a morning!" and wondered what he should do with himself till dinner-time. It was not yet a quarter-past twelve. Still, the hours had passed with extraordinary speed. He stood aimless at the corner of the pavement, and people who, having had their fill of the sun and the spectacle in the Square, were strolling slowly away, saw a fair young man, in a stylish suit, evidently belonging to the aloof classes, gazing at nothing whatever, with his hands elegantly in his pockets.

CHAPTER XIV

MONEY

I

THINGS sometimes fall out in a surprising way, and the removal of the Clayhanger household from the corner of Duck Square to the heights of Bleakridge was diversified by a circumstance which Edwin, the person whom alone it concerned, had not in the least anticipated.

It was the Monday morning after the Centenary. Foster's largest furniture-van, painted all over with fine pictures of the van itself travelling by road, rail, and sea, stood loaded in front of the shop. One van had already departed, and this second one, in its crammed interior, on its crowded roof, on a swinging platform beneath its floor, and on a posterior ledge supported by rusty chains, contained all that was left of the furniture and domestic goods which Darius Clayhanger had collected in half a century of ownership. The moral effect of Foster's activity was always salutary, in that Foster would prove to any man how small a space the acquisitions of a lifetime could be made to occupy when the object was not to display, but to pack them. Foster could put all your pride on to four wheels, and Foster's driver would crack a whip and be off with the lot of it as though it were no more than a load of coal.

The pavement and the road were littered with straw, and the straw straggled into the shop, and heaped itself at the open side door. One large brass saucepan lay lorn near the doorstep, a proof that Foster was human. For everything except that saucepan a place had been found. That saucepan had witnessed sundry ineffectual efforts to lodge it, and had also suffered frequent forgetfulness. A tin candlestick had taken refuge within it, and was trusting for safety to the might of the obstinate vessel. In the sequel, the candlestick was

pitched by Edwin on to the roof of the van, and Darius Clayhanger, coming fussily out of the shop, threw a question at Edwin and then picked up the saucepan and went off to Bleakridge with it, thus making sure that it would not be forgotten, and demonstrating to the town that he, Darius, was at last 'flitting' into his grand new house. Even weighted by the saucepan, in which Mrs. Nixon had boiled hundredweights of jam, he still managed to keep his arms slanted outwards and motionless, retaining his appearance of a rigid body that swam smoothly along on mechanical legs. Darius, though putting control upon himself, was in a state of high complex emotion, partly due to apprehensiveness about the violent changing of the habits of a quarter of a century, and partly due to nervous pride.

Maggie and Mrs. Nixon had gone to the new house half an hour earlier, to devise encampments therein for the night ; for the Clayhangers would definitely sleep no more at the corner of Duck Square ; the rooms in which they had eaten and slept and lain awake, and learnt what life and what death was, were to be transformed into workshops and stores for an increasing business. The premises were not abandoned empty. The shop had to function as usual on that formidable day, and the printing had to proceed. This had complicated the affair of the removal ; but it had helped everybody to pretend, in an adult and sedate manner, that nothing in the least unusual was afoot.

Edwin loitered on the pavement, with his brain all tingling, and excitedly incapable of any consecutive thought whatever. It was his duty to wait. Two of Foster's men were across in the vaults of the Dragon ; the rest were at Bleakridge with the first and smaller van. Only one of Foster's horses was in the dropped double-shafts, and even he had his nose towards the van, and in a nosebag ; two others were to come down soon from Bleakridge to assist.

II

A tall, thin, grey-bearded man crossed Trafalgar Road from Aboukir Street. He was very tall and very thin, and the peculiarity of his walk was that the knees were never quite straightened, so that his height was really greater even than it

seemed. His dark suit and his boots and hat were extraordinarily neat. You could be sure at once that he was a person of immutable habits. He stopped when, out of the corner of his eye, whose gaze was always precisely parallel to the direction of his feet, he glimpsed Edwin. Deflecting his course, he went close to Edwin, and, addressing the vacant air immediately over Edwin's pate, he said in a mysterious, confidential whisper—

“When are you coming in for that money?”

He spoke as though he was anxious to avoid, by a perfect air of nonchalance, arousing the suspicions of some concealed emissary of the Russian secret police.

Edwin started. “Oh!” he exclaimed. “Is it ready?”

“Yes. Waiting.”

“Are you going to your office now?”

“Yes.”

Edwin hesitated. “It won't take a minute, I suppose. I'll slip along in two jiffs. I'll be there almost as soon as you are.”

“Bring a receipt stamp,” said the man, and resumed his way.

He was the secretary of the Bursley and Turnhill Permanent £50 Benefit Building Society, one of the most solid institutions of the district. And he had been its secretary for decades. No stories of the defalcation of other secretaries of societies, no rumours as to the perils of the system of the more famous Starr-Bowkett Building Societies, ever bred a doubt in Bursley or Turnhill of the eternal soundness of the Bursley and Turnhill Permanent £50 Benefit Building Society. You could acquire a share in it by an entrance fee of one shilling, and then you paid eighteenpence per week for ten years, making something less than £40, and then, after an inactive period of three months, the Society gave you £50, and you began therewith to build a house, if you wanted a house, and, if you were prudent, you instantly took out another share. You could have as many shares as you chose. Though the Society was chiefly nourished by respectable artisans with stiff chins, nobody in the district would have considered membership to be beneath him. The Society was an admirable device for strengthening an impulse towards thrift, because, once

you had put yourself into its machinery, it would stand no nonsense. Prosperous tradesmen would push their children into it, and even themselves. This was what had happened to Edwin in the dark past, before he had left school. Edwin had regarded the trick with indifference at first, because, except the opening half-crown, his father had paid the subscriptions for him until he left school and became a wage-earner. Thereafter he had regarded it as simple parental madness.

His whole life seemed to be nothing but a vista of Friday evenings on which he went to the Society's office, between seven and nine, to 'pay the Club.' The social origin of any family in Bursley might have been decided by the detail whether it referred to the Society as the 'Building Society' or as 'the Club.' Artisans called it the Club, because it did resemble an old-fashioned benefit club. Edwin had invariably heard it called 'Club' at home, and he called it 'Club,' and he did not know why.

III

On ten thousand Friday evenings, as it seemed to him, he had gone into the gas-lit office with the wire-blinds, in the Cock Yard. And the procedure never varied. Behind a large table sat two gentlemen, the secretary and a subordinate, who was, however, older than the secretary. They had enormous ledgers in front of them, and at the lower corners of the immense pages was a transverse crease, like a mountain range on the left and like a valley on the right, caused by secretarial thumbs in turning over. On the table were also large metal inkstands and wooden money-coffers. The two officials both wore spectacles, and they both looked above their spectacles when they talked to members across the table. They spoke in low tones; they smiled with the most scrupulous politeness; they never wasted words. They counted money with prim and efficient gestures, ringing gold with the mien of judges inaccessible to human emotions. They wrote in the ledgers, and on the membership-cards, in a hand astoundingly regular and discreetly flourished; the pages of the ledgers had the mystic charm of ancient manuscripts, and the finality of decrees of Fate. Apparently the scribes never made mistakes, but sometimes they would whisper in

colloquy, and one, without leaning his body, would run a finger across the ledger of the other; their fingers knew intimately the geography of the ledgers, and moved as though they could have found a desired name, date, or number, in the dark. The whole ceremony was impressive. It really did impress Edwin, as he would wait his turn among the three or four proud and respectable members that the going and coming seemed always to leave in the room. The modest blue-yellow gas, the vast table and ledgers, and the two sober heads behind; the polite murmurings, the rustle of leaves, the chink of money, the smooth sound of elegant pens: all this made something not merely impressive, but beautiful; something that had a true if narrow dignity; something that ministered to an ideal if a low one.

But Edwin had regarded the operation as a complete loss of the money whose payment it involved. Ten years! It was an eternity! And even then his father would have some preposterous suggestion for rendering useless the unimaginable fifty pounds! Meanwhile the weekly deduction of eighteenpence from his miserable income was an exasperating strain. And then one night the secretary had told him that he was entering on his last month. If he had possessed any genuine interest in money, he would have known for himself; but he did not. And then the payments had ceased. He had said nothing to his father.

And now the share had matured, and there was the unimaginable sum waiting for him! He got his hat and a stamp, and hurried to the Cock Yard. The secretary, in his private room, now gave him five notes as though the notes had been naught but tissue paper, and he accepted them in the same inhuman manner. The secretary asked him if he meant to take out another share, and from sheer moral cowardice he said that he did mean to do so; and he did so, on the spot. And in less than ten minutes he was back at the shop. Nothing had happened there. The other horses had not come down from Bleakridge, and the men had not come out of the Dragon. But he had fifty pounds in his pocket, and it was lawfully his. A quarter of an hour earlier he positively could not have conceived the miracle.

IV

Two days later, on the Wednesday evening, Edwin was in his new bedroom, overlooking his father's garden, with a glimpse of the garden of Lane End House. His chamber, for him, was palatial, and it was at once the symbol and the scene of his new life. A stranger entering would have beheld a fair-sized room, a narrow bed, two chairs, an old-fashioned table, a new wardrobe, an old dressing-table, a curious carpet and hearthrug, low bookshelves on either side of the fire-place, and a few prints and drawings, not all of them framed, on the distempered walls. A stranger might have said in its praise that it was light and airy. But a stranger could not have had the divine vision that Edwin had. Edwin looked at it and saw clearly, and with the surest conviction, that it was wonderful. He stood on the hearthrug, with his back to the hearth, bending his body concavely and then convexly with the idle, easy sinuousness of youth, and he saw that it was wonderful. As an organic whole it was wonderful. Its defects were qualities. For instance, it had no convenience for washing; but with a bathroom a few yards off, who would encumber his study (it was a study) with washing apparatus? He had actually presented his old ramshackle washstand to the attic which was to be occupied by Mrs. Nixon's niece, a girl engaged to aid her aunt in the terrible work of keeping clean a vast mansion.

And the bedroom could show one or two details that in a bedroom were luxurious. Chief of these were the carpet, the hearthrug and the table. Edwin owed them to a marvellous piece of good fortune. He had feared, and even Maggie had feared, that their father would impair the practical value and the charm of the new house by parsimony in the matter of furniture. The furniture in the domestic portion of the old dwelling was quite inadequate for the new one, and scarcely fit for it either. Happily Darius had heard of a houseful of furniture for sale at Oldcastle by private treaty, and in a wild, adventurous hour he had purchased it, exceedingly cheap. Edwin had been amazed at his luck (he accepted the windfall as his own private luck) when he first saw the bought furniture in the new house, before the removal. Out of it he had selected

the table, the carpet, and the rug for his bedroom, and none had demurred. He noticed that his father listened to him, in affairs of the new house, as to an individuality whose views demanded some trifle of respect. Beyond question his father was proving himself to possess a mind equal to the grand situation. What with the second servant and the furniture, Edwin felt that he would not have to blush for the house, no matter who might enter it to spy it out. As for his own room, he would not object to the Sunday seeing it. Indeed he would rather like the Sunday to see it, on his next visit. Already it was in nearly complete order, for he had shown a singular, callous regard for the progress of the rest of the house: against which surprising display of selfishness both Maggie and Mrs. Nixon had glumly protested. The truth was that he was entirely obsessed by his room; it had disabled his conscience.

When he had oscillated on his heels and toes for a few moments with his gaze on the table, he faced about, and stared in a sort of vacant beatitude at the bookshelves to the left hand; those to the right hand were as yet empty. Twilight was deepening.

V

He heard his father's heavy and clumsy footstep on the landing. The old man seemed to wander uncertainly a little, and then he pushed open Edwin's door with a brusque movement and entered the room. The two exchanged a look. They seldom addressed each other, save for an immediate practical purpose, and they did not address each other now. But Darius ejaculated "Um!" as he glanced around. They had no intimacy. Darius never showed any interest in his son as an independent human being with a developing personality, though he might have felt such an interest; and Edwin was never conscious of a desire to share any of his ideas or ideals with his father, whom he was content to accept as a creature of inscrutable motives. Now, he resented his father's incursion. He considered his room as his castle, whereof his rightful exclusive dominion ran as far as the door-mat; and to placate his pride Darius should have indicated by some gesture or word that he admitted being a

visitor on sufferance. It was nothing to Edwin that Darius owned the room and nearly everything in it. He was generally nervous in his father's presence, and his submissiveness only hid a spiritual independence that was not less fierce for being restrained. He thought Darius a gross fleshly organism, as he indeed was, and he privately objected to many paternal mannerisms, of eating, drinking, breathing, eructation, speech, deportment, and garb. Further, he had noted, and felt, the increasing moroseness of his father's demeanour. He could remember a period when Darius had moods of grim gaiety, displaying rough humour ; these moods had long ceased to occur.

" So this is how ye've fixed yerself up ! " Darius observed.

" Yes," Edwin smiled, not moving from the hearthrug, and not ceasing to oscillate on heels and toes.

" Well, I'll say this. Ye've got a goodish notion of looking after yerself. When ye can spare a few minutes to do a bit downstairs——" This sentence was sarcastic and required no finishing.

" I was just coming," said Edwin. And to himself, " What on earth does he want here, making his noises ? "

With youthful lack of imagination and of sympathy, he quite failed to perceive the patent fact that his father had been drawn into the room by the very same instinct which had caused Edwin to stand on the hearthrug in an idle bliss of contemplation. It did not cross his mind that his father, too, was during those days going through wondrous mental experiences, that his father, too, had begun a new life, that his father, too, was intensely proud of the house and found pleasure in merely looking at it, and looking at it again, and at every corner of it.

A glint of gold attracted the eye of Darius to the second shelf of the left-hand bookcase, and he went towards it with the arrogance of an autocrat whose authority recognizes no limit. Fourteen fine calf-backed volumes stood on that shelf in a row ; twelve of them were uniform, the other two odd. These books were taller and more distinguished than any of their neighbours. Their sole possible rivals were half a dozen garishly bound Middle School prizes, machine-tooled, and to be mistaken for treasures only at a distance of several yards.

Edwin trembled, and loathed himself for trembling. He walked to the window.

"What be these?" Darius inquired.

"Oh! Some books I've been picking up."

VI

That same morning Edwin had been to the St. Luke's Covered Market to buy some apples for Maggie, who had not yet perfected the organization necessary to a house-mistress who does not live within half a minute of a large central source of supplies. And, to his astonishment, he had observed that one of the interior shops was occupied by a second-hand bookseller with an address at Hanbridge. He had never noticed the shop before, or, if he had noticed it, he had despised it. But the chat with Tom Orgreave had awakened in him the alertness of a hunter. The shop was not formally open—Wednesday's market being only half a market. The shopkeeper, however, was busy within. Edwin loitered. Behind the piles of negligible sermons, pietisms, keepsakes, school-books, and 'Aristotles' (tied up in red twine, these last), he could descry, in the farther gloom, actual folios and quartos. It was like seeing the gleam of nuggets on the familiar slopes of Mow Cop, which is the Five Towns' mountain. The proprietor, an extraordinarily grimy man, invited him to examine. He could not refuse. He found Byron's "Childe Harold" in one volume and "Don Juan" in another, both royal octavo editions, slightly stained, but bound in full calf. He bought them. He knew that to keep his resolutions he must read a lot of poetry. Then he saw Voltaire's prose tales in four volumes, in French,—an enchanting Didot edition, with ink as black as Hades and paper as white as snow; also bound in full calf. He bought them. And then the proprietor showed him, in eight similar volumes, Voltaire's "Dictionnaire Philosophique." He did not want it; but it matched the tales and it was impressive to the eye. And so he bought the other eight volumes. The total cost was seventeen shillings. He was intoxicated and he was frightened. What a nucleus for a collection of real books, of treasures! Those volumes would do no shame even to Tom Orgreave's bookcase. And they had been lying in the Covered

Market, of all places in the universe. . . . Blind ! How blind he had been to the possibilities of existence ! Laden with a bag of apples in one hand and a heavy parcel of books in the other, he had had to go up to dinner in the car. It was no matter ; he possessed riches. The car stopped specially for him at the portals of the new house. He had introduced the books into the new house surreptitiously, because he was in fear, despite his acute joy. He had pushed the parcel under the bed. After tea, he had passed half an hour in gazing at the volumes, as at precious contraband. Then he had ranged them on the shelf and had gazed at them for perhaps another quarter of an hour. And now his father, with the infallible nose of fathers for that which is no concern of theirs, had lighted upon them and was peering into them, and fingering them with his careless, brutal hands,—hands that could not differentiate between a ready reckoner and a treasure. As the light failed, he brought one of them and then another to the window.

“ Um ! ” he muttered. “ Voltaire ! ”

“ Um ! Byron ! ”

And : “ How much did they ask ye for these ? ”

“ Fifteen shillings,” said Edwin, in a low voice.

“ Here ! Take it ! ” said his father, relinquishing a volume to him. He spoke in a queer, hard voice ; and instantly left the room. Edwin followed him shortly and assisted Maggie to hang pictures in that wilderness, the drawing-room. Supper was eaten in silence ; and Maggie looked askance from her father to her brother, both of whom had a strained demeanour.

CHAPTER XV

THE INSULT

I

THE cold bath, the early excursion into the oblong of meadow that was beginning to be a garden, the brisk stimulating walk down Trafalgar Road to business,—all these novel experiences, which for a year Edwin had been anticipating with joyous eagerness as bliss final and sure, had lost their savour on the following morning. He had been ingenuous enough to believe that he would be happy in the new house—that the new house somehow meant the rebirth of himself and his family. Strange delusion! The bath-splashings and the other things gave him no pleasure. because he was saying to himself all the time, “There’s going to be a row this morning. There’s going to be a regular shindy this morning!” Yet he was accustomed to his father’s scenes. . . . Not a word at breakfast, for which indeed Darius was very late. But a thick cloud over the breakfast-table! Maggie showed that she felt the cloud. So did even Mrs. Nixon. The niece alone, unskilled in the science of meteorology, did not notice it, and was pertly bright. Edwin departed before his father, hurrying. He knew that his father, starting from the luxurious books, would ask him brutally what he meant by daring to draw out his share from the Club without mentioning the affair, and particularly without confiding to his safe custody the whole sum withdrawn. He knew that his father would persist in regarding the fifty pounds as sacred, as the ark of the covenant, and on the basis of the alleged outrage would build one of those cold furies that seemed to give him so perverse a delight. On the other hand, despite his father’s peculiar intonation of the names of Edwin’s authors—Voltaire and Byron—he did not fear to be upbraided for possessing himself of loose and poisonous literature.

It was a point to his father's credit that he never attempted any kind of censorship. Edwin never knew whether this attitude was the result of indifference or due to a grim sporting instinct.

There was no sign of trouble in the shop until noon. Darius was very busy superintending the transformation of the former living-rooms upstairs into supplementary workshops, and also the jobbing builder was at work according to the plans of Osmond Orgreave. But at five minutes past twelve—just before Stifford went out to his dinner—Darius entered the ebonized cubicle, and said curtly to Edwin, who was writing there—

“Show me your book.”

This demand surprised Edwin. ‘His’ book was the shop-sales book. He was responsible for it, and for the petty cash-book, and for the shop till. His father's private cash-book was utterly unknown to him, and he had no trustworthy idea of the financial totality of the business; but the management of the shop till gave him the air of being in his father's confidence, accustomed him to the discipline of anxiety, and also somewhat flattered him.

He produced the book. The last complete page had not been added up.

“Add this,” said his father.

Darius himself added up the few lines on the incomplete page.

“Stiff,” he shouted, “bring me the sales-slip.”

The amounts of sales conducted by Stifford himself were written on a slip of paper from which Edwin transferred the items at frequent intervals to the book.

“Go to yer dinner,” said Darius to Stifford, when he appeared at the door of the cubicle with the slip.

“It's not quite time yet, sir.”

“Go to yer dinner, I tell ye.”

Stifford had three-quarters of an hour for his dinner.

II

Darius combined the slip with the book and made a total.

“Petty cash,” he muttered shortly.

Edwin produced the petty cash-book, a volume of very trifling importance.

"Now bring me the till."

Edwin went out of the cubicle and brought the till, which was a large and battered japanned cash-box with a lid in two independent parts, from its well-concealed drawer behind the fancy-counter. Darius counted the coins in it and made calculations on blotting-paper, breathing stertorously all the time.

"What on earth are you trying to get at?" Edwin asked, with innocent familiarity. He thought that the Club-share crisis had been postponed by one of his father's swift strange caprices.

Darius turned on him glaring: "I'm trying to get at where ye got the brass from to buy them there books as I saw last night. Where *did* ye get it from? There's nowt wrong here, unless ye're a mighty lot cleverer than I take ye for. Where did ye get it from? Ye don't mean to tell me as ye saved it up!"

Edwin had had some shocks in his life. This was the greatest. He could feel his cheeks and his hands growing dully hot, and his eyes smarting; and he was suddenly animated by an almost murderous hatred and an inexpressible disgust for his father, who in the grossness of his perceptions and his notions had imagined his son to be a thief. "Loathsome beast!" he thought savagely.

"I'm waiting," said his father.

"I've drawn my Club money," said Edwin.

For an instant the old man was at a loss; then he understood. He had entirely forgotten the maturing of the Club share, and assuredly he had not dreamed that Edwin would accept and secrete so vast a sum as fifty pounds without uttering a word. Darius had made a mistake, and a bad one; but in those days fathers were never wrong; above all they never apologized. In Edwin's wicked act of concealment Darius could choose new and effective ground, and he did so.

"And what dost mean by doing that and saying nowt? Sneaking——"

"What do you mean by calling me a thief?" Edwin and Darius were equally startled by this speech. Edwin knew

not what had come over him, and Darius, never having been addressed in such a dangerous tone by his son, was at a loss.

"I never called ye a thief."

"Yes, you did! Yes, you did!" Edwin nearly shouted now. "You starve me for money, until I haven't got sixpence to bless myself with. You couldn't get a man to do what I do for twice what you pay me. And then you call me a thief. And then you jump down my throat because I spend a bit of money of my own." He snorted. He knew that he was quite mad, but there was a strange drunken pleasure in this madness.

"Hold yer tongue, lad!" said Darius, as stiffly as he could. But Darius, having been unprepared, was intimidated. Darius vaguely comprehended that a new and disturbing factor had come into his life. "Make a less row!" he went on more strongly. "D'ye want all th' street to hear ye?"

"I won't make a less row. You make as much noise as you want, and I'll make as much noise as I want!" Edwin cried louder and louder. And then in bitter scorn, "Thief, indeed!"

"I never called ye a——"

"Let me come out!" Edwin shouted. They were very close together. Darius saw that his son's face was all drawn. Edwin snatched his hat off its hook, pushed violently past his father and, sticking his hands deep in his pockets, strode into the street.

III

In four minutes he was hammering on the front door of the new house. Maggie opened, in alarm. Edwin did not see how alarmed she was by his appearance.

"What——"

"Father thinks I've been stealing his damned money!" Edwin snapped, in a breaking voice. The statement was not quite accurate, but it suited his boiling anger to put it in the present tense instead of in the past. He hesitated an instant in the hall, throwing a look behind at Maggie, who stood entranced with her hand on the latch of the open door. Then he bounded upstairs, and shut himself in his room with a

tremendous bang that shook the house. He wanted to cry, but he would not.

Nobody disturbed him till about two o'clock, when Maggie knocked at the door, and opened it, without entering.

"Edwin, I've kept your dinner hot."

"No, thanks." He was standing with his legs wide apart on the hearthrug.

"Father's had his dinner and gone."

"No, thanks."

She closed the door again.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SEQUEL

I

"**I** SAY, Edwin," Maggie called through the door.

"Well, come in, come in," he replied gruffly. And as he spoke he sped from the window, where he was drumming on the pane, to the hearthrug, so that he should have the air of not having moved since Maggie's previous visit. He knew not why he made this manœuvre, unless it was that he thought vaguely that Maggie's impression of the seriousness of the crisis might thereby be intensified.

She stood in the doorway, evidently placatory and sympathetic, and behind her stood Mrs. Nixon, in a condition of great mental turmoil.

"I think you'd better come and have your tea," said Maggie firmly, and yet gently. She was soft and stout, and incapable of asserting herself with dignity; but she was his elder, and there were moments when an unusual, scarce-perceptible quality in her voice would demand from him a particular attention.

He shook his head, and looked sternly at his watch, in the manner of one who could be adamant. He was astonished to see that the hour was a quarter-past six.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"Father? He's had his tea and gone back to the shop. Come along."

"I must wash myself first," said Edwin gloomily. He did not wish to yield, but he was undeniably very hungry indeed.

Mrs. Nixon could not leave him alone at tea, worrying him with offers of specialities to tempt him. He wondered who had told the old thing about the affair. Then he reflected that she had probably heard his outburst when he entered the house. Possibly the pert, nice niece also had heard it.

Maggie remained sewing at the bow-window of the dining-room while he ate a plenteous tea.

"Father said I could tell you that you could pay yourself an extra half-crown a week wages from next Saturday," said Maggie suddenly, when she saw he had finished. It was always Edwin who paid wages in the Clayhanger establishment.

He was extremely startled by this news, with all that it implied of surrender and of pacific intentions. But he endeavoured to hide what he felt, and only snorted.

"He's been talking, then? What did he say?"

"Oh! Not much! He told me I could tell you if I liked."

"It would have looked better of him, if he'd told me himself," said Edwin, determined to be ruthless. Maggie offered no response.

II

After about a quarter of an hour he went into the garden, and kicked stones in front of him. He could not classify his thoughts. He considered himself to be perfectly tranquillized now, but he was mistaken. As he idled in the beautiful August twilight near the garden-front of the house, catching faintly the conversation of Mrs. Nixon and her niece as it floated through the open window of the kitchen, round the corner, together with quiet soothing sounds of washing-up, he heard a sudden noise in the garden-porch, and turned swiftly. His father stood there. Both of them were off guard. Their eyes met.

"Had your tea?" Darius asked, in an unnatural tone.

"Yes," said Edwin.

Darius, having saved his face, hurried into the house, and Edwin moved down the garden, with heart sensibly beating. The encounter renewed his agitation.

And at the corner of the garden, over the hedge, which had been repaired, Janet entrapped him. She seemed to have sprung out of the ground. He could not avoid greeting her, and in order to do so he had to dominate himself by force. She was in white. She appeared always to wear white on fine summer days. Her smile was exquisitely benignant.

"So you're installed?" she began.

They talked of the removal, she asking questions and commenting, and he giving brief replies.

"I'm all alone to-night," she said, in a pause, "except for Alicia. Father and mother and the boys are gone to a fête at Longshaw."

"And Miss Lessways?" he inquired self-consciously.

"Oh! She's gone," said Janet. "She's gone back to London. Went yesterday."

"Rather sudden, isn't it?"

"Well, she had to go."

"Does she live in London?" Edwin asked, with an air of indifference.

"She does just now."

"I only ask because I thought from something she said she came from Turnhill way."

"Her people do," said Janet. "Yes, you may say she's a Turnhill girl."

"She seems very fond of poetry," said Edwin.

"You've noticed it!" Janet's face illuminated the dark.

"You should hear her recite!"

"Recites, does she?"

"You'd have heard her that night you were here. But when she knew you were coming, she made us all promise not to ask her."

"Really!" said Edwin. "But why? She didn't know me. She'd never seen me."

"Oh! She might have just seen you in the street. In fact I believe she had. But that wasn't the reason," Janet laughed. "It was just that you were a stranger. She's very sensitive, you know."

"Ye-es," he admitted.

III

He took leave of Janet, somehow, and went for a walk up to Toft End, where the wind blows. His thoughts were more complex than ever in the darkness. So she had made them all promise not to ask her to recite while he was at the Or-greaves! She had seen him, previous to that, in the street, and had obviously discussed him with Janet. . . . And then,

at nearly midnight, she had followed him to the new house ! And on the day of the Centenary she had manœuvred to let Janet and Mr. Orgreave go in front. . . . He did not like her. She was too changeable, too dark, and too light. . . . But it was exciting. It was flattering. He saw again and again her gesture as she bent to Mr. Shushions ; and the straightening of her spine as she left the garden-porch on the night of his visit to the Orgreaves. . . . Yet he did not like her. Her sudden departure, however, was a disappointment ; it was certainly too abrupt. . . . Probably very characteristic of her. . . . Strange day ! He had been suspected of theft. He had stood up to his father. He had remained away from the shop. And his father's only retort was to give him a rise of half a crown a week !

" The old man must have had a bit of a shock ! " he said to himself, grimly vain. " I lay I don't hear another word about that fifty pounds."

Yes, amid his profound resentment, there was some ingenuous vanity at the turn which things had taken. And he was particularly content about the rise of half a crown a week, because that relieved him from the most difficult of all the resolutions the carrying out of which was to mark the beginning of the new life. It settled the financial question, for the present at any rate. It was not enough, but it was a great deal—from his father. He was ashamed that he could not keep his righteous resentment pure from this gross satisfaction at an increase of income. The fineness of his nature was thereby hurt. But the gross satisfaction would well up in his mind.

And in the night, with the breeze on his cheek, and the lamps of the Five Towns curving out below him, he was not unhappy, despite what he had suffered and was still suffering. He had a tingling consciousness of being unusually alive.

IV

Later, in his bedroom, shut in, and safe and independent, with the new blind drawn, and the gas fizzing in its opaline globe, he tried to read " Don Juan." He could not. He was incapable of fixity of mind. He could not follow the sense of a single stanza. Images of his father and of Hilda Lessways

mingled with reveries of the insult he had received and the triumph he had won, and all the confused wonder of the day and evening engaged his thoughts. He dwelt lovingly on the supreme disappointment of his career. He fancied what he would have been doing, and where he would have been then, if his appalling father had not made it impossible for him to be an architect. He pitied himself. But he saw the material of happiness ahead, in the faithful execution of his resolves for self-perfecting. And Hilda had flattered him. Hilda had given him a new conception of himself. . . . A tiny idea arose in his brain that there was perhaps some slight excuse for his father's suspicion of him. After all, he had been secretive. He trampled on that idea, and it arose again.

He slept very heavily, and woke with a headache. A week elapsed before his agitation entirely disappeared, and hence before he could realize how extreme that agitation had been. He was ashamed of having so madly and wildly abandoned himself to passion.

CHAPTER XVII

CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE

I

TIME passed, like a ship across a distant horizon, which moves but which does not seem to move. One Monday evening Edwin said that he was going round to Lane End House. He had been saying so for weeks, and hesitating. He thoroughly enjoyed going to Lane End House; there was no reason why he should not go frequently and regularly, and there were several reasons why he should. Yet his visitings were capricious because his nature was irresolute. That night he went, sticking a hat carelessly on his head, and his hands deep into his pockets. Down the slope of Trafalgar Road, in the biting November mist, between the two rows of gas-lamps that flickered feebly into the pale gloom, came a long straggling band of men who also, to compensate for the absence of overcoats, stuck hands deep into pockets, and strode quickly. With reluctance they divided for the passage of the steam-car, and closed growling together again on its rear. The potters were on strike, and a Bursley contingent was returning in embittered silence from a mass meeting at Hanbridge. When the sound of the steam-car subsided, as the car dipped over the hill-top on its descent towards Hanbridge, nothing could be heard but the tramp-tramp of the procession on the road.

Edwin hurried down the side-street, and in a moment rang at the front door of the Orgreaves'. He nodded familiarly to the servant who opened, stepped on to the mat, and began contorting his legs in order to wipe the edge of his boot-soles.

"Quite a stranger, sir!" said Martha, bridling, and respectfully aware of her attractiveness for this friend of the house.

"Yes," he laughed. "Anybody in?"

"Well, sir, I'm afraid Miss Janet and Miss Alicia are out."

"And Mr. Tom?"

"Mr. Tom's out, sir. He pretty nearly always is now, sir." The fact was that Tom was engaged to be married, and the servant indicated, by a scarcely perceptible motion of the chin, that fiancés were and ever would be all the same. "And Mr. John and Mr. James are out too, sir." They also were usually out. They were both assisting their father in business, and sought relief from his gigantic conception of a day's work by evening diversions at Hanbridge. These two former noisy Liberals had joined the Hanbridge Conservative Club because it *was* a club, and had a billiard-table that could only be equalled at the Five Towns Hotel at Knype.

"And Mr. Orgreave?"

"He's working upstairs, sir. Mrs. Orgreave's got her asthma, and so he's working upstairs."

"Well, tell them I've called." Edwin turned to depart.

"I'm sure Mr. Orgreave would like to know you're here, sir," said the maid firmly. "If you'll just step into the breakfast-room." That maid did as she chose with visitors for whom she had a fancy.

II

She conducted him to the so-called breakfast-room and shut the door on him. It was a small chamber behind the drawing-room, and shabbier than the drawing-room. In earlier days the children had used it for their lessons and hobbies. And now it was used as a sitting-room when mere cosiness was demanded by a decimated family. Edwin stooped down and mended the fire. Then he went to the wall and examined a framed water-colour of the old Sytch Pottery, which was signed with his initials. He had done it, aided by a photograph, and by Johnnie Orgreave in details of perspective, and by dint of preprandial frequentings of the Sytch, as a gift for Mrs. Orgreave. It always seemed to him to be rather good.

Then he bent to examine bookshelves. Like the hall, the drawing-room, and the dining-room, this apartment, too, was plenteously full of everything, and littered over with the apparatus of various personalities. Only from habit did

Edwin glance at the books. He knew their backs by heart. And books in quantity no longer intimidated him. Despite his grave defects as a keeper of resolves, despite his paltry trick of picking up a newspaper or periodical and reading it all through, out of sheer vacillation and mental sloth, before starting serious perusals, despite the human disinclination which he had to bracing himself, and keeping up the tension, in a manner necessary for the reading of long and difficult works, and despite sundry ignominious backslidings into original sluggishness—still he had accomplished certain literary adventures. He could not enjoy “Don Juan.” Expecting from it a voluptuous and daring grandeur, he had found in it nothing whatever that even roughly fitted into his idea of what poetry was. But he had had a passion for “Childe Harold,” many stanzas of which thrilled him again and again, bringing back to his mind what Hilda Lessways had said about poetry. And further, he had a passion for Voltaire. In Voltaire, also, he had been deceived, as in Byron. He had expected something violent, arid, closely argumentative; and he found gaiety, grace, and really the funniest jokes. He could read “Candide” almost without a dictionary, and he had intense pride in doing so, and for some time afterwards “Candide” and “La Princesse de Babylone,” and a few similar witty trifles, were the greatest stories in the world for him. Only a faint reserve in Tom Orgreave’s responsive enthusiasm made him cautiously reflect.

He could never be intimate with Tom, because Tom somehow never came out from behind his spectacles. But he had learnt much from him, and in especial a familiarity with the less difficult of Bach’s preludes and fugues, which Tom loved to play. Edwin knew not even the notes of music, and he was not sure that Bach gave him pleasure. Bach affected him strangely. He would ask for Bach out of a continually renewed curiosity, so that he could examine once more and yet again the sensations which the music produced; and the habit grew. As regards the fugues, there could be no doubt that, the fugue begun, a desire was thereby set up in him for the resolution of the confusing problem created in the first few bars, and that he waited, with a pleasant and yet a trying anxiety, for the indications of that resolution, and

that the final reassuring and utterly tranquillizing chords gave him deep joy. When he innocently said that he was 'glad when the end came of a fugue,' all the Orgreaves laughed heartily, but after laughing, Tom said that he knew what Edwin meant and quite agreed.

III

It was while he was glancing along the untidy and crowded shelves with sophisticated eye that the door brusquely opened. He looked up mildly, expecting a face familiar, and saw one that startled him, and heard a voice that aroused disconcerting vibrations in himself. It was Hilda Lessways. She had in her hand a copy of the "Signal." Over fifteen months had gone since their last meeting, but not since he had last thought of her. Her features seemed strange. His memory of them had not been reliable. He had formed an image of her in his mind, and had often looked at it, and he now saw that it did not correspond with the reality. The souvenir of their brief intimacy swept back upon him. Incredible that she should be there, in front of him; and yet there she was! More than once, after reflecting on her, he had laughed, and said lightly to himself: "Well, the chances are I shall never see *her* again! Funny girl!" But the recollection of her gesture with Mr. Shushions prevented him from dismissing her out of his head with quite that lightness. . . .

"I'm ordered to tell you that Mr. Orgreave will be down in a few minutes," she said.

"*Hello!*" he exclaimed. "I'd no idea you were in Bursley!"

"Came to-day!" she replied.

"How odd," he thought, "that I should call like this on the very day she comes!" But he pushed away that instinctive thought with the rational thought that such a coincidence could not be regarded as in any way significant.

They shook hands in the middle of the room, and she pressed his hand, while looking downwards with a smile. And his mind was suddenly filled with the idea that during all those months she had been existing somewhere, under the eye of some one, intimate with some one, and constantly conducting herself with a familiar freedom that doubtless she would not

use to him. And so she was invested, for him, with mysteriousness. His interest in her was renewed in a moment and in a form much more acute than its first form. Moreover, she presented herself to his judgment in a different aspect. He could scarcely comprehend how he had ever deemed her habitual expression to be forbidding. In fact, he could persuade himself now that she was beautiful, and even nobly beautiful. From one extreme he flew to the other. She sat down on an old sofa ; he remained standing. And in the midst of a little conversation about Mrs. Orgreave's indisposition, and the absence of the members of the family (she said she had refused an invitation to go with Janet and Alicia to Hillport), she broke the thread, and remarked—

“ You would have known I was coming if you'd been calling here recently.” She pushed her feet near the fender, and gazed into the fire.

“ Ah ! But, you see, I haven't been calling recently.”

She raised her eyes to his. “ I suppose you've never thought about me once since I left ! ” she fired at him. An audacious and discomposing girl !

“ Oh yes, I have,” he said weakly. What could you reply to such speeches ? Nevertheless he was flattered.

“ Really ? But you've never inquired about me.”

“ Yes, I have.”

“ Only once.”

“ How do you know ? ”

“ I asked Janet.”

“ Damn her ! ” he said to himself, but pleased with her. And aloud, in a tone suddenly firm, “ That's nothing to go by.”

“ What isn't ? ”

“ The number of *times* I've inquired.” He was blushing.

IV

In the smallness of the room, sitting as it were at his feet on the sofa, surrounded and encaged by a hundred domestic objects and by the glow of the fire and the radiance of the gas, she certainly did seem to Edwin to be an organism exceedingly mysterious. He could follow with his eye every fold of her black dress, he could trace the waving of her hair, and

watch the play of light in her eyes. He might have physically hurt her, he might have killed her, she was beneath his hand—and yet she was most bafflingly withdrawn, and the essence of her could not be touched nor got at. Why did she challenge him by her singular attitude? Why was she always saying such queer things to him? No other girl (he thought, in the simplicity of his inexperience) would ever talk as she talked. He wanted to test her by being rude to her. “Damn her!” he said to himself again. “Supposing I took hold of her and kissed her—I wonder what sort of a face she’d pull then! . . .” (And a moment ago he had been appraising her as nobly beautiful! A moment ago he had been dwelling on the lovely compassion of her gesture with Mr. Shushions!) This quality of daring and naughty enterprise had never before shown itself in Edwin, and he was surprised to discover in himself such impulses. But then the girl was so provocative. And somehow the sight of the girl delivered him from an excessive fear of consequences. He said to himself, “I’ll do something or I’ll say something, before I leave her to-night, just to show her! . . .” He screwed up his resolution to the point of registering a private oath that he would indeed do or say something. Without a solemn oath he could not rely upon his valour. He knew that whatever he said or did in the nature of a bold advance would be accomplished clumsily. He knew that it would be unpleasant. He knew that inaction suited much better his instinct for tranquillity. No matter! All that was naught. She had challenged, and he had to respond. Besides, she allured. . . . And, after her scene with him in the porch of the new house, had he not the right? . . . A girl who had behaved as she did that night cannot effectively contradict herself!

“I was just reading about this strike,” she said, rustling the newspaper.

“You’ve soon got into local politics.”

“Well,” she said, “I saw a lot of the men as we were driving from the station. I should think I saw two thousand of them. So of course I was interested. I made Mr. Orgreave tell me all about it. Will they win?”

“It depends on the weather.” He smiled.

She remained silent, and grave. “I see!” she said, leaning

her chin on her hand. At her tone he ceased smiling. She said "I see," and she actually had seen.

"You see," he repeated. "If it was June instead of November! But then it isn't June. Wages are settled every year in November. So if there is to be a strike it can only begin in November."

"But didn't the men ask for the time of year to be changed?"

"Yes," he said. "But you don't suppose the masters were going to agree to that, do you?" He sneered masculinely.

"Why not?"

"Because it gives them such a pull."

"What a shame!" Hilda exclaimed passionately. "And what a shame it is that the masters want to make the wages depend on selling prices! Can't they see that selling prices ought to depend on wages?"

Edwin said nothing. She had knocked suddenly out of his head all ideas of flirting, and he was trying to reassemble them.

"I suppose you're like all the rest!" she questioned gloomily.

"How like all the rest?"

"Against the men. Mr. Orgreave is, and he says your father is very strongly against them."

"Look here," said Edwin, with an air of resentment as to which he himself could not have decided whether it was assumed or genuine, "what earthly right have you to suppose that I'm like all the rest?"

"I'm very sorry," she surrendered. "I knew all the time you weren't." With her face still bent downwards, she looked up at him, smiling sadly, smiling roguishly.

"Father's against them," he proceeded, somewhat deflated. And he thought of all his father's violent invective, and of Maggie's bland acceptance of the assumption that workmen on strike were rascals—how different the excellent simple Maggie from this feverish creature on the sofa! "Father's against them, and most people are, because they broke the last arbitration award. But I'm not my father. If you ask me, I'll tell you what I think—workmen on strike are always in the right; at bottom I mean. You've only got to look at them

in a crowd together. They don't starve themselves for fun."

He was not sure if he was convinced of the truth of these statements; but she drew them out of him by her strange power. And when he had uttered them, they appeared fine to him.

"What does your father say to that?"

"Oh!" said Edwin uneasily. "Him—and me—we don't argue about these things."

"Why not?"

"Well, we don't."

"You aren't ashamed of your own opinions, are you?" she demanded, with a hint in her voice that she was ready to be scornful.

"You know all the time I'm not." He repeated the phrase of her previous confession with a certain acrimonious emphasis. "Don't you?" he added curtly.

She remained silent.

"Don't you?" he said more loudly. And as she offered no reply, he went on, marvelling at what was coming out of his mouth. "I'll tell you what I am ashamed of. I'm ashamed of seeing my father lose his temper. So you know!"

She said—

"I never met anybody like you before. No, never!"

At this he really was astounded, and most exquisitely flattered.

"I might say the same of you," he replied, sticking his chin out.

"Oh no!" she said. "I'm nothing."

The fact was that he could not foretell their conversation even ten seconds in advance. It was full of the completely unexpected. He thought to himself, "You never know what a girl like that will say next." But what would *he* say next?

V

They were interrupted by Osmond Orgreave, with his "Well, Edwin," jolly, welcoming, and yet slightly quizzical. Edwin could not look him in the face without feeling self-conscious. Nor dared he glance at Hilda to see what her

demeanour was like under the good-natured scrutiny of her friend's father.

"We thought you'd forgotten us," said Mr. Orgreave. "But that's always the way with neighbours." He turned to Hilda. "It's true," he continued, jerking his head at Edwin. "He scarcely ever comes to see us, except when you're here."

"Steady on!" Edwin murmured. "Steady on, Mr. Orgreave!" And hastily he asked a question about Mrs. Orgreave's asthma; and from that the conversation passed to the doings of the various absent members of the family.

"You've been working, as usual, I suppose," said Edwin.

"Working!" laughed Mr. Orgreave. "I've done what I could, with Hilda there! Instead of going up to Hillport with Janet, she would stop here and chatter about strikes."

Hilda smiled at him benevolently as at one to whom she permitted everything.

"Mr. Clayhanger agrees with me," she said.

"Oh! You needn't tell me!" protested Mr. Orgreave. "I could see you were as thick as thieves over it." He looked at Edwin. "Has she told you she wants to go over a printing works?"

"No," said Edwin. "But I shall be very pleased to show her over ours, any time."

She made no observation.

"Look here," said Edwin suddenly, "I must be off. I only slipped in for a minute, really." He did not know why he said this, for his greatest wish was to probe more deeply into the tantalizing psychology of Hilda Lessways. His tongue, however, had said it, and his tongue reiterated it when Mr. Orgreave urged that Janet and Alicia would be back soon and that food would then be partaken of. He would not stay. Desiring to stay, he would not. He wished to be alone, to think. Clearly Hilda had been talking about him to Mr. Orgreave, and to Janet. Did she discuss him and his affairs with everybody?

Nor would he, in response to Mr. Orgreave's suggestion, promise definitely to call again on the next evening. He said he would try. Hilda took leave of him nonchalantly. He departed.

And as he made the half-circuit of the misty lawn, on his way to the gates, he muttered in his heart, where even he himself could scarcely hear: "I swore I'd do something, and I haven't. Well, of course, when she talked seriously like that, what could I do?" But he was disgusted with himself and ashamed of his namby-paminess.

He strolled thoughtfully up Oak Street, and down Trafalgar Road; and when he was near home, another wayfarer saw him face right about and go up Trafalgar Road and disappear at the corner of Oak Street.

The Orgreave servant was surprised to see him at the front door again when she answered a discreet ring.

"I wish you'd tell Miss Lessways I want to speak to her a moment, will you?"

"Miss Lessways?"

"Yes." What an adventure!

"Certainly, sir. Will you come in?" She shut the door.

"Ask her to come here," he said, smiling with deliberate confidential persuasiveness. She nodded, with a brighter smile.

The servant vanished, and Hilda came. She was as red as fire. He began hurriedly—

"When will you come to look over our works? To-morrow? I should like you to come." He used a tone that said: "Now don't let's have any nonsense! You know you want to come."

She frowned frankly. There they were in the hall, like a couple of conspirators, but she was frowning; she would not meet him half-way. He wished he had not permitted himself this caprice. What importance had a private oath? He felt ridiculous.

"What time?" she demanded, and in an instant transformed his disgust into delight.

"Any time." His heart was beating with expectation.

"Oh no! You must fix the time."

"Well, after tea. Say between half-past six and a quarter to seven. That do?"

She nodded.

"Good," he murmured. "That's all! Thanks. Good-night!"

He hastened away, with a delicate photograph of the palm of her hand printed in minute sensations on the palm of his.

"I did it, anyhow!" he muttered loudly, in his heart. At any rate he was not shamed. At any rate he was a man. The man's face was burning, and the damp noxious chill of the night only caressed him agreeably.

CHAPTER XVIII

CURIOSITY

I

HE was afraid that, from some obscure motive of propriety or self-protection, she would bring Janet with her, or perhaps Alicia. On the other hand, he was afraid that she would come alone. That she should come alone seemed to him, in spite of his reason, too brazen. Moreover, if she came alone would he be equal to the situation? Would he be able to carry the thing off in a manner adequate? He lacked confidence. He desired the moment of her arrival, and yet he feared it. His heart and his brain were all confused together in a turmoil of emotion which he could not analyse nor define.

He was in love. Love had caught him, and had affected his vision so that he no longer saw any phenomenon as it actually was; neither himself, nor Hilda, nor the circumstances which were uniting them. He could not follow a train of thought. He could not remain of one opinion nor in one mind. Within himself he was perpetually discussing Hilda, and her attitude. She was marvellous! But was she? She admired him! But did she? She had shown cunning! But was it not simplicity? He did not even feel sure whether he liked her. He tried to remember what she looked like, and he positively could not. The one matter upon which he could be sure was that his curiosity was hotly engaged. If he had had to state the case in words to another he would not have gone further than the word 'curiosity.' He had no notion that he was in love. He did not know what love was; he had not had sufficient opportunity of learning. Nevertheless the processes of love were at work within him. Silently and magically, by the force of desire and of pride, the refracting glass was being specially ground which would enable him, which would

compel him, to see an ideal Hilda when he gazed at the real Hilda. He would not see the real Hilda any more unless some cataclysm should shatter the glass. And he might be likened to a prisoner on whom the gate of freedom is shut for ever, or to a stricken sufferer of whom it is known that he can never rise again and go forth into the fields. He was as somebody to whom the irrevocable had happened. And he knew it not. None knew. None guessed. All day he went his ways, striving to conceal the whirring preoccupation of his curiosity (a curiosity which he thought showed a fine masculine dash), and succeeded fairly well. The excellent, simple Maggie alone remarked in secret that he was slightly nervous and unnatural. But even she, with all her excellent simplicity, did not divine his victimhood.

At six o'clock he was back at the shop from his tea. It was a wet, chill night. On the previous evening he had caught cold, and he was beginning to sneeze. He said to himself that Hilda could not be expected to come on such a night. But he expected her. When the shop clock showed half-past six, he glanced at his watch, which also showed half-past six. Now at any instant she might arrive. The shop door opened, and simultaneously his heart ceased to beat. But the person who came in, puffing and snorting, was his father, who stood within the shop while shaking his soaked umbrella over the exterior porch. The draught from the shiny dark street and square struck cold, and Edwin responsively sneezed ; and Darius Clayhanger upbraided him for not having worn his overcoat, and he replied with foolish unconvincingness that he had got a cold, that it was nothing. Darius grunted his way into the cubicle. Edwin remained in busy idleness at the right-hand counter ; Stifford was tidying the contents of drawers behind the fancy-counter. And the fizzing gas-burners, inevitable accompaniment of night at the period, kept watch above. Under the heat of the stove, the damp marks of Darius Clayhanger's entrance disappeared more quickly than the minutes ran. It grew almost impossible for Edwin to pass the time. At moments when his father was not stirring in the cubicle, and Stifford happened to be in repose, he could hear the ticking of the clock, which he

could not remember ever having heard before, except when he mounted the steps to wind it.

At a quarter to seven he said to himself that he gave up hope, while pretending that he never had hoped, and that Hilda's presence was indifferent to him. If she came not that day she would probably come some other day. What could it matter? He was very unhappy. He said to himself that he should have a long night's reading, but the prospect of reading had no savour. He said: "No, I shan't go in to see them to-night, I shall stay in and nurse my cold, and read." This was mere futile bravado, for the impartial spectator in him, though far less clear-sighted and judicial now than formerly, foresaw with certainty that if Hilda did not come he would call at the Orgreaves'. At five minutes to seven he was miserable: he had decided to hope until five minutes to seven. He made it seven in despair. Then there were signs of a figure behind the misty glass of the door. The door opened. It could not be she! Impossible that it should be she! But it was she; she had the air of being a miracle.

II

His feelings were complex and contradictory, flitting about and crossing each other in his mind with astounding rapidity. He wished she had not come, because his father was there, and the thought of his father would intensify his self-consciousness. He wondered why he should care whether she came or not; after all, she was only a young woman who wanted to see a printing works; at best she was not so agreeable as Janet, at worst she was appalling, and, moreover, he knew nothing about her. He had a glimpse of her face as, with a little aightening of the lips, she shut her umbrella. What was there in that face, judged impartially? Why should he be to so absurd a degree curious about her? He thought how exquisitely delicious it would be to be walking with her by the shore of a lovely lake on a summer evening, pale hills in the distance. He had this momentary vision by reason of a coloured print of the "Silver Strand" of a Scottish loch which was leaning in a gilt frame against the artists' materials cabinet and was marked twelve-and-six. During the day he

had imagined himself with her in all kinds of beautiful spots and situations. But the chief of his sensations was one of exquisite relief. . . . She had come. He could wreak his hungry curiosity upon her.

Yes, she was alone. No Janet! No Alicia! How had she managed it? What had she said to the Orgreaves? That she should have come alone, and through the November rain, in the night, affected him deeply. It gave her the quality of a heroine of high adventure. It was as though she had set sail unaided, in a frail skiff, on a formidable ocean, to meet him. It was inexpressibly romantic and touching. She came towards him, her face sedately composed. She wore a small hat, a veil, and a mackintosh, and black gloves that were splashed with wet. Certainly she was a practical woman. She had said she would come, and she had come, sensibly, but how charmingly, protected against the shocking conditions of the journey. There is naught charming in a mackintosh. And yet there was, in this mackintosh! . . . Something in the contrast between its harshness and her fragility. . . . The veil was supremely charming. She had half lifted it, exposing her mouth; the upper part of her flushed face was caged behind the bars of the veil; behind those bars her eyes mysteriously gleamed. . . . Spanish! . . . No exaggeration in all this! He felt every bit of it honestly, as he stood at the counter in thrilled expectancy. By virtue of his impassioned curiosity, the terraces of Granada and the mantillas of *señoritas* were not more romantic than he had made his father's shop and her dripping mackintosh. He tried to see her afresh; he tried to see her as though he had never seen her before; he tried desperately once again to comprehend what it was in her that piqued him. And he could not. He fell back from the attempt. Was she the most wondrous? Or was she commonplace? Was she deceiving him? Or did he alone possess the true insight? . . . Useless! He was baffled. Far from piercing her soul, he could scarcely even see her at all; that is, with intelligence. And it was always so when he was with her: he was in a dream, a vapour; he had no helm, his faculties were not under control. She robbed him of judgment.

And then the clear tones of her voice fell on the listening

shop : " Good evening, Mr. Clayhanger. What a night, isn't it ? I hope I'm not too late."

Firm, business-like syllables. . . . And she straightened her shoulders. He suffered. He was not happy. Whatever his feelings, he was not happy in that instant. He was not happy because he was wrung between hope and fear, alike divine. But he would not have exchanged his sensations for the extremest felicity of any other person.

They shook hands. He suggested that she should remove her mackintosh. She consented. He had no idea that the effect of the removal of the mackintosh would be so startling as it was. She stood intimately revealed in her frock. The mackintosh was formal and defensive ; the frock was intimate and acquiescent.

Darius blundered out of the cubicle and Edwin had a dreadful moment introducing her to Darius and explaining their purpose. Why had he not prepared the ground in advance ? His pusillanimous cowardice again ! However, the directing finger of God sent a customer into the shop, and Edwin escaped with his Hilda through the aperture in the counter.

III

The rickety building at the back of the premises, which was still the main theatre of printing activities, was empty save for Big James, the hour of seven being past. Big James was just beginning to roll his apron round his waist, in preparation for departure. This happened to be one of the habits of his advancing age. Up till a year or two previously he would have taken off his apron and left it in the workshop ; but now he could not confide it to the workshop ; he must carry it about him until he reached home and a place of safety for it. When he saw Edwin and a young lady appear in the doorway, he let the apron fall over his knees again. As the day was only the second of the industrial week, the apron was almost clean ; and even the office towel, which hung on a roller somewhat conspicuously near the door, was not offensive. A single gas-jet burned. The workshop was in the languor of repose after toil which had officially commenced at 8 a.m.

The perfection of Big James's attitude, an attitude symbolized by the letting down of his apron, helped to put Edwin at ease in the original and difficult circumstances. "Good evening, Mr. Edwin. Good evening, miss," was all that the man actually said with his tongue, but the formality of his majestic gestures indicated in the most dignified way his recognition of a sharp difference of class and his exact comprehension of his own rôle in the affair. He stood waiting: he had been about to depart, but he was entirely at the disposal of the company.

"This is Mr. Yarlett, our foreman," said Edwin, and to Big James: "Miss Lessways has just come to look round."

Hilda smiled. Big James suavely nodded his head.

"Here are some of the types," said Edwin, because a big case was the object nearest him, and he glanced at Big James.

In a moment the foreman was explaining to Hilda, in his superb voice, the use of the composing-stick, and he accompanied the theory by a beautiful exposition of the practice; Edwin could stand aside and watch. Hilda listened and looked with an extraordinary air of sympathetic interest. And she was so serious, so adult. But it was the quality of sympathy, he thought, that was her finest, her most attractive. It was either that or her proud independence, as of a person not accustomed to bend to the will of others or to go to others for advice. He could not be sure. . . . No! Her finest quality was her mystery. Even now, as he gazed at her comfortably, she baffled him; all her exquisite little movements and intonations baffled him. Of one thing, however, he was convinced: that she was fundamentally different from other women. There was she, and there was the rest of the sex.

For appearance' sake he threw in short phrases now and then, to which Big James, by his mere deportment, gave the importance of the words of a master.

"I suppose you printers did something special among yourselves to celebrate the four-hundredth anniversary of the invention of printing?" said Hilda suddenly, glancing from Edwin to Big James. And Big James and Edwin glanced at one another. Neither had ever heard of the four-hundredth anniversary of the invention of printing. In a couple of

seconds Big James's downcast eye had made it clear that he regarded this portion of the episode as master's business.

"When was that?—let me see," Edwin foolishly blurted out.

"Oh! Some years ago. Two or three—perhaps four."

"I'm afraid we didn't," said Edwin, smiling.

"Oh!" said Hilda slowly. "I think they made a great fuss of it in London." She relented somewhat. "I don't really know much about it. But the other day I happened to be reading the new history of printing, you know—Cranswick's, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes!" Edwin concurred, though he had never heard of Cranswick's new history of printing either.

He knew that he was not emerging creditably from this portion of the episode. But he did not care. The whole of his body went hot and then cold as his mind presented the simple question: "Why had she been reading the history of printing?" Could the reason be any other than her interest in himself? Or was she a prodigy among young women, who read histories of everything in addition to being passionate about verse? He said that it was ridiculous to suppose that she would read a history of printing solely from interest in himself. Nevertheless he was madly happy for a few moments, and as it were staggered with joy. He decided to read a history of printing at once.

Big James came to the end of his expositions of the craft. The stove was dying out, and the steam-boiler cold. Big James regretted that the larger machines could not be seen in action, and that the place was getting chilly. Edwin began to name various objects that were lying about, with their functions, but it was evident that the interest of the workshop was now nearly exhausted. Big James suggested that if Miss could make it convenient to call, say, on the next afternoon, she could see the large new Columbia in motion. Edwin seized the idea and beautified it. And on this he wavered towards the door, and she followed, and Big James in dignity bowed them forth to the elevated porch, and began to rewind his flowing apron once more. They pattered down the dark steps (now protected with felt

roofing) and ran across six feet of exposed yard into what had once been Mrs. Nixon's holy kitchen.

IV

After glancing at sundry minor workshops in delicious propinquity and solitude, they mounted to the first floor, where there was an account-book ruling and binding shop: the site of the old sitting-room and the girls' bedroom. In each chamber Edwin had to light a gas, and the corridors and stairways were traversed by the ray of matches. It was excitingly intricate. Then they went to the attics, because Edwin was determined that she should see all. There he found a forgotten candle.

"I used to work here," he said, holding high the candle. "There was no other place for me to work in."

They were in his old work attic, now piled with stocks of paper wrapped up in posters.

"Work? What sort of work?"

"Well—reading, drawing, you know. . . . At that very table." To be sure, there the very table was, thick with dust! It had been too rickety to deserve removal to the heights of Bleakridge. He was touched by the sight of the table now, though he saw it at least once every week. His existence at the corner of Duck Square seemed now to have been beautiful and sad, seemed to be far off and historic. And the attic seemed unhappy in its present humiliation.

"But there's no fire-place," murmured Hilda.

"I know," said Edwin.

"But how did you do in winter?"

"I did without."

He had in fact been less of a martyr than those three telling words would indicate. Nevertheless it appeared to him that he really had been a martyr; and he was glad. He could feel her sympathy and her quiet admiration vibrating through the air towards him. Had she not said that she had never met anybody like him? He turned and looked at her. Her eyes glittered in the candlelight with tears too proud to fall. Solemn and exquisite bliss! Profound anxiety and apprehension! He was an arena where all the sensations of which a human being is capable struggled in blind confusion.

Afterwards he could recall her visit only in fragments. The next fragment that he recollected was the last. She stood outside the door in her mackintosh. The rain had ceased. She was going. Behind them he could feel his father in the cubicle, and Stifford arranging the toilette of the shop for the night.

"Please don't come out here," she enjoined, half in entreaty, half in command. Her solicitude thrilled him. He was on the step, she was on the pavement: so that he looked down at her, with the sodden, light-reflecting slope of Duck Square for a background to her.

"Oh! I'm all right. Well, you'll come to-morrow afternoon?"

"No, you aren't all right. You've got a cold and you'll make it worse, and this isn't the end of winter, it's the beginning; I think you're very liable to colds."

"N-no!" he said, enchanted, beside himself in an ecstasy of pleasure. "I shall expect you to-morrow about three."

"Thank you," she said simply. "I'll come."

They shook hands.

"Now do go in!"

She vanished round the corner.

All the evening he neither read nor spoke.

CHAPTER XIX

A CATASTROPHE

I

AT half-past two on the following afternoon he was waiting for the future in order to recommence living. During this period, to a greater extent even than the average individual in average circumstances, he was incapable of living in the present. Continually he looked either forward or back. All that he had achieved, or that had been achieved for him—the new house with its brightness and its apparatus of luxury, his books, his learning, his friends, his experience: not long since regarded by him as the precious materials of happiness—all had become negligible trifles, nothings, devoid of import. The sole condition precedent to a tolerable existence was now to have sight and speech of Hilda Lessways. He was intensely unhappy in the long stretches of time which separated one contact with her from the next. And in the brief moments of their companionship he was far too distraught, too apprehensive, too desirous, too puzzled, to be able to call himself happy. Seeing her apparently did naught to assuage the pain of his curiosity about her—not his curiosity concerning the details of her life and of her person, for these scarcely interested him, but his curiosity concerning the very essence of her being. At seven o'clock on the previous day, he had esteemed her visit as possessing a decisive importance which covered the whole field of his wishes. The visit had occurred, and he was not a whit advanced; indeed he had retrograded, for he was less content and more confused, and more preoccupied. The medicine had aggravated the disease. Nevertheless, he awaited a second dose of it in the undestroyed illusion of its curative property.

In the interval he had behaved like a very sensible man. Without appetite, he had still forced himself to eat, lest his

relatives should suspect. Short of sleep, he had been careful to avoid yawning at breakfast, and had spoken in a casual tone of Hilda's visit. He had even said to his father: "I suppose the big Columbia will be running off those overseer notices this afternoon?" And on the old man asking why he was thus interested, he had answered: "Because that girl, Miss Lessways, thought of coming down to see it. For some reason or other she's very keen on printing, and as she's such a friend of the Orgreaves——"

Nobody, he considered, could have done that better than he had done it.

And now that girl, Miss Lessways, was nearly due. He stood behind the counter again, waiting, waiting. He could not apply himself to anything; he could scarcely wait. He was in a state that approached fever, if not agony. To exist from half-past two to three o'clock equalled in anguish the dreadful inquietude that comes before a surgical operation.

He said to himself: "If I keep on like this I shall be in love with her one of these days." He would not and could not believe that he already was in love with her, though the possibility presented itself to him. "No," he said, "you don't fall in love in a couple of days. You mustn't tell me——" in a wise, superior, slightly scornful manner. "I dare say there's nothing in it at all," he said uncertainly, after having strongly denied throughout that there was anything in it.

The recollection of his original antipathy to Hilda troubled him. She was the same girl. She was the same girl who had followed him at night into his father's garden and merited his disdain. She was the same girl who had been so unpleasant, so sharp, so rudely disconcerting in her behaviour. And he dared not say that she had altered. And yet now he could not get her out of his head. And although he would not admit that he constantly admired her, he did admit that there were moments when he admired her passionately and deemed her unique and above all women. Whence the change in himself? How to justify it? The problem was insoluble, for he was intellectually too honest to say lightly that originally he had been mistaken. He did not pretend to solve the problem. He looked at it with perturbation, and left it.

The consoling thing was that the Orgreaves had always expressed high esteem for Hilda. He leaned on the Orgreaves.

He wondered how the affair would end? It could not indefinitely continue on its present footing. How indeed would it end? Marriage. . . . He apologized to himself for the thought. . . . But just for the sake of argument . . . supposing . . . well, supposing the affair went so far that one day he told her . . . men did such things, young men! No! . . . Besides, she wouldn't . . . It was absurd. . . . No such idea really! . . . And then the frightful worry there would be with his father about money and so on. . . . And the telling of Clara, and of everybody. No! He simply could not imagine himself married or about to be married. Marriage might happen to other young men, but not to him. His case was special, somehow. . . . He shrank from such formidable enterprises. The mere notion of them made him tremble.

II

He brushed all that away impatiently, pettishly. The intense and terrible longing for her arrival persisted. It was now twenty-five to three. His father would be down soon from his after-dinner nap. Suddenly the door opened, and he saw the Orgreaves' servant, with a cloak over her white apron, and hands red with cold. And also he saw disaster like a ghostly figure following her. His heart sickeningly sank. Martha smiled and gave him a note, which he smilingly accepted. "Miss Lessways asked me to come down with this," she said confidentially. She was a little breathless, and she had absolutely the manner of a singing chambermaid in light opera. He opened the note, which said: "Dear Mr. Clayhanger, so sorry I can't come to-day.—Yours, H. L." Nothing else. It was scrawled. "It's all right, thanks," he said, with an even brighter smile to the messenger, who nodded and departed.

It all occurred in an instant.

III

A catastrophe! He suffered then as he had never suffered. His was no state approaching agony; it was agony itself,

black and awful. She was not coming. She had not troubled herself to give a reason, nor to offer an excuse. She merely was not coming. She had showed no consideration for his feelings. It had not happened to her to reflect that she would be causing him disappointment. Disappointment was too mild a word. He had been building a marvellously beautiful castle, and with a thoughtless, careless stroke of the pen she had annihilated all his labour ; she had almost annihilated him. Surely she owed him some reason, some explanation ! Had she the right to play fast and loose with him like that ? "What a shame !" he sobbed violently in his heart, with an excessive and righteous resentment. He was innocent ; he was blameless ; and she tortured him thus ! He supposed that all women were like her. . . . "What a shame !" He pitied himself for a victim. And there was no glint of hope anywhere. In half an hour he would have been near her, with her, guiding her to the workshop, discussing the machine with her ; and savouring her uniqueness ; feasting on her delicious and adorable personality ! . . . 'So sorry I can't come to-day' ! "She doesn't understand. She can't understand !" he said to himself. "No woman, however cruel, would ever knowingly be so cruel as she has been. It isn't possible !" Then he sought excuse for her, and then he cast the excuse away angrily. She was not coming. There was no ground beneath his feet. He was so exquisitely miserable that he could not face a future of even ten hours ahead. He could not look at what his existence would be till bedtime. The blow had deprived him of all force, all courage. It was a wanton blow. He wished savagely that he had never seen her. . . . No ! no ! He could not call on the Orgreaves that night. He could not do it. She might be out. And then . . .

His father entered, and began to grumble. Both Edwin and Maggie had known since the beginning of dinner that Darius was quaking on the precipice of a bad bilious attack. Edwin listened to the rising storm of words. He had to resume the thread of his daily life. He knew what affliction was.

CHAPTER XX

THE MAN

I

BUT he was young. Indeed to men of fifty, men just twice his age, he seemed a mere boy and incapable of grief. He was so slim, and his limbs were so loose, and his hair so fair, and his gestures often so naïve, that few of the mature people who saw him daily striding up and down Trafalgar Road could have believed him to be acquainted with sorrow like their sorrows. The next morning, as it were in justification of these maturer people, his youth arose and fought with the malady in him, and, if it did not conquer, it was not defeated. On the previous night, after hours of hesitation, he had suddenly walked forth and gone down Oak Street, and pushed open the garden gates of the Orgreaves, and gazed at the façade of the house—not at her window, because that was at the side—and it was all dark. The Orgreaves had gone to bed: he had expected it. Even this perfectly futile reconnaissance had calmed him. While dressing in the bleak sunrise he had looked at the oval lawn of the Orgreaves' garden, and had seen Johnnie idly kicking a football on it. Johnnie had probably spent the evening with her; and it was nothing to Johnnie! She was there, somewhere between him and Johnnie, within fifty yards of both of them, mysterious and withdrawn as ever, busy at something or other. And it was naught to Johnnie! By the thought of all this the woe in him was strengthened and embittered. Nevertheless his youth, aided by the astringent quality of the clear dawn, still struggled sturdily against it. And he ate six times more breakfast than his suffering and insupportable father.

At half-past one—it was Thursday, and the shop closed at two o'clock—he had put on courage like a garment, and

decided that he would see her that afternoon or night, 'or perish in the attempt.' And as the remembered phrase of the Sunday passed through his mind, he inwardly smiled and thought of school; and felt old and sure.

II

At five minutes to two, as he stood behind the eternal counter in his eternal dream, he had the inexpressible and delectable shock of seeing her. He was shot by the vision of her as by a bullet. She came in, hurried and preoccupied, apparently full of purpose.

"Have you got a Bradshaw?" she inquired, after the briefest greeting, gazing at him across the counter, through her veil, as though imploring him for Bradshaw.

"I'm afraid we haven't one left," he said. "You see it's getting on for the end of the month. I could—— No, I suppose you want it at once?"

"I want it now," she replied. "I'm going to London by the six express, and what I want to know is whether I can get on to Brighton to-night. They actually haven't a Bradshaw up there," half in scorn and half in levity, "and they said you'd probably have one here. So I ran down."

"They'd be certain to have one at the Tiger," he murmured, reflecting.

"The Tiger!" Evidently she did not care for the idea of the Tiger. "What about the railway station?"

"Yes, or the railway station. I'll go up there with you now if you like, and find out for you. I know the head porter. We're just closing. Father's at home. He's not very well." She thanked him, relief in her voice.

In a minute he had put his hat and coat on and given instructions to Stifford, and he was climbing Duck Bank with Hilda at his side. He had forgiven her. Nay, he had forgotten her crime. The disaster, with all its despair, was sponged clean from his mind like writing off a slate, and as rapidly. It was effaced. He tried to collect his faculties and savour the new sensations. But he could not. Within him all was incoherent, wild, and distracting. Five minutes earlier, and he could not have conceived the bliss of walking with her to the station. Now he was walking with her to the

station ; and assuredly it was bliss, and yet he did not fully taste it. Though he would not have loosed her for a million pounds, her presence gave an even crueller edge to his anxiety and apprehension. London ! Brighton ! Would she be that night in Brighton ? He felt helpless, and desperate. And beneath all this was the throbbing of a strange, bitter joy. She asked about his cold and about his father's indisposition. She said nothing of her failure to appear on the previous day, and he knew not how to introduce it neatly : he was not in control of his intelligence.

They passed Snaggs's Theatre, and from its green, wooden walls came the obscure sound of humanity in emotion. Before the mean and shabby portals stood a small crowd of ragged urchins. Posters printed by Darius Clayhanger made white squares on the front.

"It's a meeting of the men," said Edwin.

"They're losing, aren't they ?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I expect they are."

She asked what the building was, and he explained.

"They used to call it the Blood Tub," he said.

She shivered. "The Blood Tub ?"

"Yes. Melodrama and murder and gore—you know."

"How horrible !" she exclaimed. "Why are people like—like that in the Five Towns ?"

"It's our form of poetry, I suppose," he muttered, smiling at the pavement, which was surprisingly dry and clean in the feeble sunshine.

"I suppose it *is* !" she agreed heartily, after a pause.

"But you belong to the Five Towns, don't you ?" he asked.

"Oh yes ! I used to."

At the station the name of Bradshaw appeared to be quite unknown. But Hilda's urgency impelled them upwards from the head porter to the ticket clerk, and from the ticket clerk to the stationmaster ; and at length they discovered, in a stuffy stove-heated room with a fine view of a shawd-ruck and a pithead, that on Thursday evenings there was a train from Victoria to Brighton at eleven-thirty. Hilda seemed to sigh relief, and her demeanour changed. But Edwin's uneasiness was only intensified. Brighton, which he had never seen, was in another hemisphere for him. It was mysterious,

like her. It was part of her mystery. What could he do? His curse was that he had no initiative. Without her relentless force, he would never have penetrated even as far as the stuffy room where the unique Bradshaw lay. It was she who had taken him to the station, not he her. How could he hold her back from Brighton?

III

When they came again to the Blood Tub, she said—

“Couldn’t we just go and look in? I’ve got plenty of time, now I know exactly how I stand.”

She halted, and glanced across the road. He could only agree to the proposition. For himself, a peculiar sense of delicacy would have made it impossible for him to intrude his prosperity upon the deliberations of starving artisans on strike and stricken; and he wondered what the potters might think or say about the invasion by a woman. But he had to traverse the street with her and enter, and he had to do so with an air of masculine protectiveness. The urchins stood apart to let them in.

Snaggs’s, dimly lit by a few glazed apertures in the roof, was nearly crammed by men who sat on the low benches and leaned standing against the side-walls. In the small and tawdry proscenium, behind a worn picture of the Bay of Naples, were silhouetted the figures of the men’s leader and of several other officials. The leader was speaking in a quiet, mild voice, the other officials were seated on Windsor chairs. The smell of the place was nauseating, and yet the atmosphere was biting cold. The warm-wrapped visitors could see rows and rows of discoloured backs and elbows, and caps, and stringy kerchiefs. They could almost feel the contraction of thousands of muscles in an involuntary effort to squeeze out the chill from all these bodies; not a score of overcoats could be discerned in the whole theatre, and many of the jackets were thin and ragged; but the officials had overcoats. And the visitors could almost see, as it were in rays, the intense fixed glances darting from every part of the interior, and piercing the upright figure in the centre of the stage.

“... Some method of compromise,” the leader was saying in his persuasive tones.

A young man sprang up furiously from the middle benches.

‘To hell wi’ compromise!’ he shouted in a tigerish passion. ‘Haven’t us had forty pound from Ameriky?’

‘Order! Order!’ some protested fiercely. But one voice cried: ‘Pitch the b—— awt, neck and crop!’

Hands clawed at the interrupter and dragged him with extreme violence to the level of the bench, where he muttered like a dying volcano. Angry growls shot up here and there, snappish, menacing, and bestial.

‘It is quite true,’ said the leader soothingly, ‘that our comrades at Trenton have collected forty pounds for us. But forty pounds would scarcely pay for a loaf of bread for one man in every ten on strike.’

There was more interruption. The dangerous growls continued in running explosions along the benches. The leader, ignoring them, turned to consult with his neighbour, and then faced his audience and called out more loudly—

‘The business of the meeting is at an end.’

The entire multitude jumped up, and there was stretching of arms and stamping of feet. The men nearest to the door now perceived Edwin and Hilda, who moved backwards as before a flood. Edwin seized Hilda’s arm to hasten her.

‘Lads,’ bawled an old man’s voice from near the stage, ‘Let’s sing ‘Rock of Ages.’’

A frowning and hirsute fellow near the door, with the veins prominent on his red forehead, shouted hoarsely, ‘‘Rock of Ages’ be b——d!’ and shifting his hands into his pockets he plunged for the street, head foremost and chin sticking out murderously. Edwin and Hilda escaped at speed and recrossed the road. The crowd came surging out of the narrow neck of the building and spread over the pavements like a sinister liquid. But from within the building came the lusty song of ‘Rock of Ages.’

‘It’s terrible!’ Hilda murmured, after a silence. ‘Just to see them is enough. I shall never forget what you said.’

‘What was that?’ he inquired. He knew what it was, but he wished to prolong the taste of her appreciation.

‘That you’ve only got to see the poor things to know they’re in the right! Oh! I’ve lost my handkerchief, unless

I've left it in your shop. It must have dropped out of my muff."

IV

The shop was closed. As with his latchkey he opened the private door and then stood on one side for her to precede him into the corridor that led to the back of the shop, he watched the stream of operatives scattering across Duck Bank and descending towards the Square. It was as if he and Hilda, being pursued, were escaping. And as Hilda, stopping an instant on the step, saw what he saw, her face took a troubled expression. They both went in and he shut the door.

"Turn to the left," he said, wondering whether the big Columbia machine would be running, for her to see if she chose.

"Oh! This takes you to the shop, does it? How funny to be behind the counter!"

He thought she spoke self-consciously, in the way of small talk: which was contrary to her habit.

"Here's my handkerchief!" she cried, with pleasure. It was on the counter, a little white wisp in the grey-sheeted gloom. Stifford must have found it on the floor and picked it up.

The idea flashed through Edwin's head: "Did she leave her handkerchief on purpose, so that we should have to come back here?"

The only illumination of the shop was from three or four diamond-shaped holes in the upper part of as many shutters. No object was at first quite distinct. The corners were very dark. All merchandise not in drawers or on shelves was hidden in pale dust cloths. A chair wrong side up was on the fancy-counter, its back hanging over the front of the counter. Hilda had wandered behind the other counter, and Edwin was in the middle of the shop. Her face in the twilight had become more mysterious than ever. He was in a state of emotion, but he did not know to what category the emotion belonged. They were alone. Stifford had gone for the half-holiday. Darius, sickly, would certainly not come near. The printers were working as usual in their

place, and the clanking whir of a treadle-machine overhead agitated the ceiling. But nobody would enter the shop. His excitement increased, but did not define itself. There was a sudden roar in Duck Square, and then cries.

"What can that be?" Hilda asked, low.

"Some of the strikers," he answered, and went through the doors to the letter-hole in the central shutter, lifted the flap, and looked through.

A struggle was in progress at the entrance to the Duck Inn. One man was apparently drunk; others were jeering on the skirts of the lean crowd.

"It's some sort of a fight among them," said Edwin loudly, so that she could hear in the shop. But at the same instant he felt the wind of the door swinging behind him, and Hilda was silently at his elbow.

"Let me look," she said.

Assuredly her voice was trembling. He moved, as little as possible, and held the flap up for her. She bent and gazed. He could hear various noises in the Square, but she described nothing to him. After a long while she withdrew from the hole.

"A lot of them have gone into the public-house," she said. "The others seem to be moving away. There's a policeman. What a shame," she burst out passionately, "that they have to drink to forget their trouble!" She made no remark upon the strangeness of starving workmen being able to pay for beer sufficient to intoxicate themselves. Nor did she comment, as a woman, on the misery of the wives and children at home in the slums and the cheap cottage-rows. She merely compassionated the men in that they were driven to brutishness. Her features showed painful pity masking disgust.

She stepped back into the shop.

"Do you know," she began, in a new tone, "you've quite altered my notion of poetry—what you said as we were going up to the station."

"Really!" He smiled nervously. He was very pleased. He would have been astounded by this speech from her, a professed devotee of poetry, if in those instants the capacity for astonishment had remained to him.

"Yes," she said, and continued, frowning and picking at

her muff: "But you *do* alter my notions, I don't know how it is. . . . So this is your little office!"

The door of the cubicle was open.

"Yes, go in and have a look at it."

"Shall I?" She went in.

He followed her.

And no sooner was she in than she muttered, "I must hurry off now." Yet a moment before she seemed to have infinite leisure.

"Shall you be at Brighton long?" he demanded, and scarcely recognized his own accents.

"Oh! I can't tell! I've no idea. It depends."

"How soon shall you be down our way again?"

She only shook her head.

"I say—you know——" he protested.

"Good-bye," she said, quavering. "Thanks very much." She held out her hand.

"But——" He took her hand.

His suffering was intolerable. It was torture of the most exquisite kind. Her hand pressed his. Something snapped in him. His left hand hovered shaking over her shoulder, and then touched her shoulder, and he could feel her left hand on his arm. The embrace was clumsy in its instinctive and unskilled violence, but its clumsiness was redeemed by all his sincerity and all hers. His eyes were within six inches of her eyes, full of delicious shame, anxiety, and surrender. They kissed . . . He had amorously kissed a woman. All his past life sank away, and he began a new life on the impetus of that supreme and final emotion. It was an emotion that in its freshness, agitating and divine, could never be renewed. He had felt the virgin answer of her lips on his. She had told him everything, she had yielded up her mystery, in a second of time. Her courage in responding to his caress ravished and amazed him. She was so unaffected, so simple, so heroic. And the cool, delicate purity of those lips! And the faint feminine odour of her flesh and even of her stuffs! Dreams and visions were surpassed. He said to himself, in the flood-tide of masculinity—

"My God! She's mine."

And it seemed incredible.

V

She was sitting in the office chair ; he on the desk. She said in a trembling voice—

“ I should never have come to the Five Towns again, if you hadn't . . . ”

“ Why not ? ”

“ I couldn't have stood it. I couldn't. ” She spoke almost bitterly, with a peculiar smile on her twitching lips.

To him it seemed that she had resumed her mystery, that he had only really known her for one instant, that he was bound to a woman entrancing, noble, but impenetrable. And this, in spite of the fact that he was close to her, touching her, tingling to her in the confined crepuscular intimacy of the cubicle. He could trace every movement of her breast as she breathed, and yet she escaped the inward searching of his gaze. But he was happy. He was happy enough to repel all anxieties and inquietudes about the future. He was steeped in the bliss of the miracle. This was but the fourth day, and they were vowed.

“ It was only Monday—— ” he began.

“ Monday ! ” she exclaimed. “ I have thought of you for over a year. ” She leaned towards him. “ Didn't you know ? Of course you did ! . . . You couldn't bear me at first. ”

He denied this, blushing, but she insisted.

“ You don't know how awful it was for me yesterday when you didn't come ! ” he murmured.

“ Was it ? ” she said, under her breath. “ I had some very important letters to write. ” She clasped his hand.

There it was again ! She spoke just like a man of business, immersed in secret schemes.

“ It's awfully funny, ” he said. “ I scarcely know anything about you, and yet—— ”

“ I'm Janet's friend ! ” she answered. Perhaps it was the delicatest reproof of imagined distrust.

“ And I don't want to, ” he went on. “ How old are you ? ”

“ Twenty-four, ” she answered sweetly, acknowledging his right to put such questions.

“ I thought you were. ”

“ I suppose you know I've got no relatives, ” she said, as if

relenting from her attitude of reproof. "Fortunately, father left just enough money for me to live on."

"Must you go to Brighton?"

She nodded.

"Where can I write to?"

"It will depend," she said. "But I shall send you the address to-morrow. I shall write you before I go to bed, whether it's to-night or to-morrow morning."

"I wonder what people will say!"

"Please tell no one, yet," she pleaded. "Really, I should prefer not! Later on, it won't seem so sudden; people are so silly."

"But shan't you tell Janet?"

She hesitated. "No! Let's keep it to ourselves till I come back."

"When shall you come back?"

"Oh! Very soon. I hope in a few days, now. But I must go to this friend at Brighton. She's relying on me."

It was enough for him, and indeed he liked the idea of a secret. "Yes, yes," he agreed eagerly.

There was the sound of another uproar in Duck Square. It appeared to roll to and fro thunderously.

She shivered. The fire was dead out in the stove, and the chill of night crept in from the street.

"It's nearly dark," she said. "I must go! I have to pack. . . . Oh dear, dear---those poor men! Somebody will be hurt!"

"I'll walk up with you," he whispered, holding her, in ownership.

"No. It will be better not. Let me out."

"Really?"

"Really!"

"But who'll take you to Knype Station?"

"Janet will go with me."

She rose reluctantly. In the darkness they were now only dim forms to each other. He struck a match, that blinded them and expired as they reached the passage. . . .

When she had gone, he stood hatless at the open side door. Right at the top of Duck Bank, he could discern, under the big lamp there, a knot of gesticulating and shouting strikers,

menacing two policemen ; and farther off, in the direction of Moorthorne Road, other strikers were running. The yellow-lit blinds of the Duck Inn across the Square seemed to screen a house of impenetrable conspiracies and debaucheries. And all that grim, perilous background only gave to his emotions a further intensity, troubling them to still stranger ecstasy. He thought : " It has happened to me, too, now—this thing that is at the bottom of everybody's mind ! I've kissed her ! I've got her ! She's marvellous, marvellous ! I couldn't have believed it. But is it true ? Has it happened ? " It passed his credence. . . . " By Jove ! I absolutely forgot about the ring ! That's a nice how d'ye do ! " . . . He saw himself married. He thought of Clara's grotesque antics with her tedious babe. And he thought of his father and of vexations. But that night he was a man. She, Hilda, with her independence and her mystery, had inspired him with a full pride of manhood. And he discovered that one of the chief attributes of a man is an immense tenderness.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MARRIAGE

I

HE was more proud and agitated than happy. The romance of the affair, and its secrecy, made him proud; the splendid qualities of Hilda made him proud. It was her mysteriousness that agitated him, and her absence rendered him unhappy in his triumph. During the whole of Friday he was thinking: "To-morrow is Saturday and I shall have her address and a letter from her." He decided that there was no hope of a letter by the last post on Friday, but as the hour of the last post drew nigh he grew excited, and was quite appreciably disappointed when it brought nothing. The fear, which had always existed in little, then waxed into enormous dread, that Saturday's post also would bring nothing. His manœuvres in the early twilight of Saturday morning were complicated by the fact that it had not been arranged whether she should write to the shop or to the house. However, he prepared for either event by having his breakfast at seven o'clock, on the plea of special work in the shop. He had finished it at half-past seven and was waiting for the postman, whose route he commanded from the dining-room window. The postman arrived. Edwin with false calm walked into the hall, saying to himself that if the letter was not in the box it would be at the shop. But the letter was in the box. He recognized her sprawling hand on the envelope through the wirework. He snatched the letter and slipped upstairs with it like a fox with a chicken. It had come, then! The letter safely in his hands he admitted more frankly that he had been very doubtful of its promptitude.

"59, PRESTON STREET, BRIGHTON, 1 a.m.

"DEAREST,—This is my address. I love you. Every bit of me is absolutely yours. Write me.—H. L."

That was all. It was enough. Its tone enchanted him. Also it startled him. But it reminded him of her lips. He had begun a letter to her. He saw now that what he had written was too cold in the expression of his feelings. Hilda's note suddenly and completely altered his views upon the composition of love-letters. "Every bit of me is absolutely yours." How fine, how untrammelled, how like Hilda! What other girl could or would have written such a phrase? More than ever was he convinced that she was unique. The thrill divine quickened in him again, and he rose eagerly to her level of passion. The romance, the secrecy, the mystery, the fever! He walked down Trafalgar Road with the letter in his pocket, and once he pulled it out to read it in the street. His discretion objected to this act, but Edwin was not his own master. Stifford, hurrying in exactly at eight, was somewhat perturbed to find his employer's son already installed in the cubicle, writing by the light of gas, as the shutters were not removed. Edwin had finished and stamped his first love-letter just as his father entered the cubicle. Owing to dyspeptic accidents Darius had not set foot in the cubicle since it had been sanctified by Hilda. Edwin, leaving it, glanced at the old man's back and thought disdainfully: "Ah! You little know, you rhinoceros, that less than two days ago, she and I, on that very spot——"

As soon as his father had gone to pay the morning visit to the printing shops, he ran out to post the letter himself. He could not be contented until it was in the post. Now, when he saw men of about his own class and age in the street, he would speculate upon their experiences in the romance of women. And it did genuinely seem to him impossible that anybody else in a town like Bursley could have passed through an episode so exquisitely strange and beautiful as that through which he was passing. Yet his reason told him that he must be wrong there. His reason, however, left him tranquil in the assurance that no girl in Bursley had ever written to her

affianced: "I love you. Every bit of me is absolutely yours."

Hilda's second letter did not arrive till the following Tuesday, by which time he had become distracted by fears and doubts. Yes, doubts! No rational being could have been more loyal than Edwin, but these little doubts would keep shooting up and withering away. He could not control them. The second letter was nearly as short as the first. It told him nothing save her love and that she was very worried by her friend's situation, and that his letters were a joy. She had had a letter from him each day. In his reply to her second he gently implied, between two lines, that her letters lacked quantity and frequency. She answered: "I simply cannot write letters. It isn't in me. Can't you tell that from my handwriting? Not even to you! You must take me as I am." She wrote each day for three days. Edwin was one of those who learn quickly, by the acceptance of facts. And he now learnt that profound lesson that an individual must be taken or left in entirety, and that you cannot change an object merely because you love it. Indeed he saw in her phrase, "You must take me as I am," the accents of original and fundamental wisdom, springing from the very roots of life. And he submitted. At intervals he would say resentfully: "But surely she could find five minutes each day to drop me a line! What's five minutes?" But he submitted. Submission was made easier when he co-ordinated with Hilda's idiosyncrasy the fact that Maggie, his own unromantic sister, could never begin to write a letter with less than from twelve to twenty-four hours' bracing of herself to the task. Maggie would be saying and saying: "I really must write that letter. . . . Dear me! I haven't written that letter yet."

His whole life seemed to be lived in the post, and postmen were the angels of the creative spirit. His unhappiness increased with the deepening of the impression that the loved creature was treating him with cruelty. Time dragged. At length he had been engaged a fortnight. On Thursday a letter should have come. It came not. Nor on Friday nor Saturday. On Sunday it must come. But it did not come on Sunday. He determined to telegraph to her on the Mon-

day morning. His loyalty, though valorous, needed aid against all those pricking battalions of ephemeral doubts. On the Sunday evening he suddenly had the idea of strengthening himself by a process that resembled boat-burning. He would speak to his father. His father's mentality was the core of a difficulty that troubled him exceedingly, and he took it into his head to attack the difficulty at once, on the spot.

II

For years past Darius Clayhanger had not gone to chapel on Sunday evening. In the morning he still went fairly regularly, but in the evening he would now sit in the drawing-room, generally alone, to read. On weekdays he never used the drawing-room, where indeed there was seldom a fire. He had been accustomed to only one living-room, and save on Sunday, when he cared to bend the major part of his mind to the matter, he scorned to complicate existence by utilizing all the resources of the house which he had built. His children might do so; but not he. He was proud enough to see to it that his house had a drawing-room, and too proud to employ the drawing-room except on the ceremonious day. After tea, at about a quarter to six, when chapel-goers were hurriedly pulling gloves on, he would begin to establish himself in a saddle-backed, ear-flapped easy chair with "The Christian News" and an ivory paper-knife as long and nearly as deadly as a scimitar. "The Christian News" was a religious weekly of a new type. It belonged to a Mr. James Bott, and it gave to God and to the mysteries of religious experience a bright and breezy actuality. Darius's children had damned it for ever on its first issue, in which Clara had found in a report of a very important charitable meeting, the following words: "Among those present were the Prince of Wales and Mr. James Bott." Such is the hasty and unjudicial nature of children that this single sentence finished the career of "The Christian News" with the younger generation. But Darius liked it, and continued to like it. He enjoyed it. He would spend an hour and a half in reading it. And further, he enjoyed cutting open the morsel. Once when Edwin, in hope of more laughter, had cut the pages

on a Saturday afternoon, and his father had found himself unable to use the paper-knife on Sunday evening, there had been a formidable inquiry: "Who's been meddling with my paper?" Darius saved the paper even from himself until Sunday evening; not till then would he touch it. This habit had flourished for several years. It appeared never to lose its charm. And Edwin did not cease to marvel at his father's pleasure in a tedious monotony.

It was the hallowed rite of reading "The Christian News" that Edwin disturbed in his sudden and capricious resolve. Maggie and Mrs. Nixon had gone to chapel, for Mrs. Nixon, by reason of her years, bearing, mantle, and reputation, could walk down Trafalgar Road by the side of her mistress on a Sunday night without offence to the delicate instincts of the town. The niece, engaged to be married at an age absurdly youthful, had been permitted by Mrs. Nixon the joy of attending even-song at the Bleakridge Church on the arm of a male, but under promise to be back at a quarter to eight to set supper. The house was perfectly still when Edwin came all on fire out of his bedroom and slid down the stairs. The gas burnt economically low within its stained-glass cage in the hall. The drawing-room door was unlatched. He hesitated a moment on the mat, and he could hear the calm ticking of the clock in the kitchen and see the red glint of the kitchen fire against the wall. Then he entered, looking and feeling apologetic.

His father was all curtained in; his slippered feet on the fender of the blazing hearth, his head cushioned to a nicety, the long paper-knife across his knees. And the room was really hot and in a glow of light. Darius turned and, lowering his face, gazed at Edwin over the top of his new gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Not gone to chapel?" he frowned.

"No! . . . I say, father, I just wanted to speak to you."

Darius made no reply, but shifted his glance from Edwin to the fire, and maintained his frown. He was displeased at the interruption. Edwin failed to shut the door at the first attempt, and then banged it in his nervousness. In spite of himself he felt like a criminal. Coming forward, he leaned his loose, slim frame against a corner of the old piano.

III

"Well?" Darius growled impatiently, even savagely. They saw each other, not once a week, but at nearly every hour of every day, and they were surfeited of the companionship.

"Supposing I wanted to get married." This sentence shot out of Edwin's mouth like a bolt. And as it flew, he blushed very red. In the privacy of his mind he was horribly swearing.

"So that's it, is it?" Darius growled again. And he leaned forward and picked up the poker, not as a menace, but because he, too, was nervous. As an opposer of his son he had never had quite the same confidence in himself since Edwin's historic fury at being suspected of theft, though apparently their relations had resumed the old basis of bullying and submission.

"Well——" Edwin hesitated. He thought, "After all, people do get married. It won't be a crime."

"Who'st been running after?" Darius demanded inimically. Instead of being softened by this rumour of love, by this hint that his son had been passing through wondrous secret hours, he instinctively and without any reason hardened himself and transformed the news into an offence. He felt no sympathy, and it did not occur to him to recall that he, too, had once thought of marrying. He was a man whom life had brutalized about half a century earlier.

"I was only thinking," said Edwin clumsily—the fool had not sense enough even to sit down—"I was only thinking, suppose *I did* want to get married."

"Who'st been running after?"

"Well, I can't rightly say there's anything—what you may call settled. In fact, nothing was to be said about it at all at present. But it's Miss Lessways, father—Hilda Lessways, you know."

"Her as came in the shop the other day?"

"Yes."

"How long's this been going on?"

Edwin thought of what Hilda had said. "Oh! Over a year." He could not possibly have said "four days." "Mind you, this is strictly q.t.! Nobody knows a word about it,

nobody ! But of course I thought I'd better tell you. You'll say nothing." He tried wistfully to appeal as one loyal man to another. But he failed. There was no ray of response on his father's gloomy features, and he slipped back insensibly into the boy whose right to an individual existence had never been formally admitted.

Something base in him—something of that baseness which occasionally actuates the oppressed—made him add : " She's got an income of her own. Her father left money." He conceived that this would placate Darius.

" I know all about her father," Darius sneered, with a short laugh. " And her father's father ! . . . Well, lad, ye'll go your own road." He appeared to have no further interest in the affair. Edwin was not surprised, for Darius was seemingly never interested in anything except his business ; but he thought how strange, how nigh to the incredible, the old man's demeanour was.

" But about money, I was thinking," he said, uneasily shifting his pose.

" What about money ? "

" Well," said Edwin, endeavouring, and failing, to find courage to put a little sharpness into his tone, " I couldn't marry on seventeen-and-six a week, could I ? "

At the age of twenty-five, at the end of nine years' experience in the management and the accountancy of a general printing and stationery business, Edwin was receiving seventeen shillings and sixpence for a sixty-five-hour week's work, the explanation being that on his father's death the whole enterprise would be his, and that all money saved was saved for him. Out of this sum he had to pay ten shillings a week to Maggie towards the cost of board and lodging, so that three half-crowns remained for his person and his soul. Thus he could expect no independence of any kind until his father's death, and he had a direct and powerful interest in his father's death. Moreover, all his future, and all unpaid reward of his labours in the past, hung hazardous on his father's goodwill. If he quarrelled with him, he might lose everything. Edwin was one of a few odd-minded persons who did not regard this arrangement as perfectly just, proper, and in accordance with sound precedent. But he was helpless.

His father would tell him, and did tell him, that he had fought no struggles, suffered no hardship, and no responsibility, and that he was simply coddled from head to foot in cotton-wool.

"I say you must go your own road," said his father.

"But at this rate I should never be able to marry!"

"Do you reckon," asked Darius, with mild cold scorn, "as you getting married will make your services worth one penny more to my business?" And he waited an answer with the august calm of one who is aware that he is unanswerable. But he might with equal propriety have tied his son's hands behind him and then diverted himself by punching his head.

"I do all I can," said Edwin meekly.

"And what about getting orders?" Darius questioned grimly. "Didn't I offer you two and a half per cent. on all new customers you got yourself? And how many have you got? Not one. I give you a chance to make extra money and you don't take it. Ye'd sooner go running about after girls."

This was a particular grievance of the father against the son: that the son brought no grist to the mill in the shape of new orders.

"But how can I get orders?" Edwin protested.

"How did I get 'em? How do I get 'em? Somebody has to get 'em." The old man's lips were pressed together, and he waved "The Christian News" slightly in his left hand.

IV

In a few minutes both their voices had risen. Darius, savage, stooped to replace with the shovel a large burning coal that had dropped on the tiles and was sending up a column of brown smoke.

"I tell you what I shall do," he said, controlling himself bitterly. "It's against my judgment, but I shall put you up to a pound a week at the New Year, if all goes well, of course. And it's good money, let me add."

He was entirely serious, and almost sincere. He loathed paying money over to his son. He was convinced that in an ideal world sons would toil gratis for their fathers who lodged

and fed them and gifted them with the reversion of excellent businesses.

"But what good's a pound a week?" Edwin demanded, with the querulousness of one who is losing hope.

"What good's a pound a week!" Darius repeated, hurt and genuinely hurt. "Let me tell you that in my time young men married on a pound a week, and glad to! A pound a week!" He finished with a sardonic exclamation.

"I couldn't marry Miss Lessways on a pound a week," Edwin murmured, in despair, his lower lip hanging. "I thought you might perhaps be offering me a partnership by this time!" Possibly in some mad hour a thought so wild had indeed flitted through his brain.

"Did you?" rejoined Darius. And in the fearful grimness of the man's accents was concealed all his intense and egoistic sense of possessing in absolute ownership the business which the little boy out of the Bastille had practically created. Edwin did not and could not understand the fierce strength of his father's emotion concerning the business. Already in tacitly agreeing to leave Edwin the business after his own death, Darius imagined himself to be superbly benevolent.

"And then there would be house-furnishing, and so on," Edwin continued.

"What about that fifty pounds?" Darius curtly inquired.

Edwin was startled. Never since the historic scene had Darius made the slightest reference to the proceeds of the Building Society share.

"I haven't spent all of it," Edwin muttered.

Do what he would with his brain, the project of marriage and house-tenancy and a separate existence obstinately presented itself to him as fantastic and preposterous. Who was he to ask so much from destiny? He could not feel that he was a man. In his father's presence he never could feel that he was a man. He remained a boy, with no rights, moral or material.

"And if as ye say she's got money of her own——" Darius remarked, and was considerably astonished when the boy walked straight out of the room and closed the door.

It was his last grain of common sense that took Edwin in silence out of the room.

Miserable, despicable baseness ! Did the old devil suppose that he would be capable of asking his wife to find the resources which he himself could not bring ? He was to say to his wife : " I can only supply a pound a week, but as you've got money it won't matter." The mere notion outraged him so awfully that if he had stayed in the room there would have been an altercation and perhaps a permanent estrangement.

As he stood furious and impotent in the hall, he thought, with his imagination quickened by the memory of Mr. Shushions : " When you're old, and I've *got* you "—he clenched his fists and his teeth—" when I've *got* you and you can't help yourself, by God it'll be my turn ! "

And he meant it.

V

He seized his overcoat and hat, and putting them on anyhow, strode out. The kitchen clock struck half-past seven as he left. Chapel-goers would soon be returning in a thin procession of twos and threes up Trafalgar Road. To avoid meeting acquaintances he turned down the side-street, towards the old road which was a continuation of Aboukir Street. There he would be safe. Letting his overcoat fly open, he thrust his hands into the pockets of his trousers. It was a cold night of mist. Humanity was separated from him by the semi-transparent blinds of the cottage windows, bright squares in the dark and enigmatic façades of the street. He was alone.

All along he had felt and known that this disgusting crisis would come to pass. He had hoped against it, but not with faith. And he had no remedy for it. What could he immediately and effectively do ? He was convinced that his father would not yield. There were frequent occasions when his father was proof against reason, when his father seemed genuinely unable to admit the claim of justice, and this occasion was one of them. He could tell by certain peculiarities of tone and gesture. A pound a week ! Assuming that he cut loose from his father, in a formal and confessed separation, he might not for a long time be in a position to earn more than a pound a week. A clerk was worth no more.

And, except as responsible manager of a business, he could only go into the market as a clerk. In the Five Towns how many printing offices were there that might at some time or another be in need of a manager? Probably not one. They were all of modest importance, and directed personally by their proprietary heads. His father's was one of the largest. . . . No! His father had nurtured and trained, in him, a helpless slave.

And how could he discuss such a humiliating question with Hilda? Could he say to Hilda: "See here, my father won't allow me more than a pound a week. What are we to do?" In what terms should he telegraph to her to-morrow?

He heard the rapid firm footsteps of a wayfarer overtaking him. He had no apprehension of being disturbed in his bitter rage. But a hand was slapped on his shoulder, and a jolly voice said—

"Now, Edwin, where's this road leading you to on a Sunday night?"

It was Osmond Orgreave who, having been tramping for exercise in the high regions beyond the loop railway line, was just going home.

"Oh! Nowhere particular," said Edwin feebly.

"Working off Sunday dinner, eh?"

"Yes." And Edwin added casually, to prove that there was nothing singular in his mood: "Nasty night!"

"You must come in a bit," said Mr. Orgreave.

"Oh no!" He shrank away.

"Now, now!" said Mr. Orgreave masterfully. "You've got to come in, so you may as well give up first as last. Janet's in. She's like you and me, she's a bad lot,—hasn't been to church." He took Edwin by the arm, and they turned into Oak Street at the lower end.

Edwin continued to object, but Mr. Orgreave, unable to scrutinize his face in the darkness, and not dreaming of an indiscretion, rode over his weak negatives, horse and foot, and drew him by force into the garden; and in the hall took his hat away from him and slid his overcoat from his shoulders. Mr. Orgreave, having accomplished a lot of forbidden labour on that Sabbath, was playful in his hospitality.

"Prisoner! Take charge of him!" exclaimed Mr. Orgreave

shortly, as he pushed Edwin into the breakfast-room and shut the door from the outside. Janet was there, exquisitely welcoming, unconsciously pouring balm from her eyes. But he thought she looked graver than usual. Edwin had to enact the part of a man to whom nothing has happened. He had to behave as though his father was the kindest and most reasonable of fathers, as though Hilda wrote fully to him every day, as though he were not even engaged to Hilda. He must talk, and he scarcely knew what he was saying.

"Heard lately from Miss Lessways?" he asked lightly, or as lightly as he could. It was a splendid effort. Impossible to expect him to start upon the weather or the strike! He did the best he could.

Janet's eyes became troubled. Speaking in a low voice she said, with a glance at the door—

"I suppose you've not heard. She's married."

He did not move.

VI

"Married?"

"Yes. It is rather sudden, isn't it?" Janet tried to smile, but she was exceedingly self-conscious. "To a Mr. Cannon. She's known him for a very long time, I think."

"When?"

"Yesterday. I had a note this morning. It's quite a secret yet. I haven't told father and mother. But she asked me to tell you if I saw you."

He thought her eyes were compassionate.

Mrs. Orgreave came smiling into the room.

"Well, Mr. Edwin, it seems we can only get you in here by main force."

"Are you quite better, Mrs. Orgreave?" he rose to greet her.

He had by some means or other to get out.

"I must just run in home a second," he said, after a moment.

"I'll be back in three minutes."

But he had no intention of coming back. He would have told any lie in order to be free.

In his bedroom, looking at himself in the glass, he could

detect on his face no sign whatever of suffering or of agitation. It seemed just an ordinary mild, unmoved face.

And this, too, he had always felt and known would come to pass : that Hilda would not be his. All that romance was unreal ; it was not true ; it had never happened. Such a thing could not happen to such as he was. . . . He could not reflect. When he tried to reflect, the top of his head seemed as though it would fly off. . . . Cannon ! She was with Cannon somewhere at that very instant. . . . She had specially asked that he should be told. And indeed he had been told before even Mr. and Mrs. Orgreave. . . . Cannon ! She might at that very instant be in Cannon's arms.

It could be said of Edwin that he fully lived that night. Fate had at any rate roused him from the coma which most men called existence.

Simple Maggie was upset because, from Edwin's absence and her father's demeanour at supper, she knew that her men-folk had had another terrible discussion. And since her father offered no remark as to it, she guessed that this one must be even more serious than the last.

There was one thing that Edwin could not fit into any of his theories of the disaster which had overtaken him and that was his memory of Hilda's divine gesture as she bent over Mr. Shushions on the morning of the Centenary.

BOOK III

HIS FREEDOM

CHAPTER I

AFTER A FUNERAL

I

FOUR and a half years later on a Tuesday night in April, 1886, Edwin was reading in an easy chair in his bedroom. He made a very image of solitary comfort. The easy chair had been taken from the dining-room, silently, without permission, and Darius had apparently not noticed its removal. A deep chair, designed by some one learned in the poses natural to the mortal body, it was firm where it ought to be firm, and where it ought to yield, there it yielded. By its own angles it threw the head slightly back, and the knees slightly up. Edwin's slippered feet rested on a hassock, and in front of the hassock was a red-glowing gas-stove. That stove, like the easy chair, had been acquired by Edwin at his father's expense without his father's cognizance. It consumed gas whose price swelled the quarterly bill three times a year, and Darius observed nothing. He had not even entered his son's bedroom for several years. Each month seemed to limit further his interest in surrounding phenomena, and to centralize more completely all his faculties in his business. Over Edwin's head the gas-jet flamed through one of Darius's special private burners, lighting the page of a little book, one of Cassell's "National Library," a new series of sixpenny reprints which had considerably excited the book-selling and the book-reading worlds, but which Darius had apparently quite ignored, though confronted in his house and in his shop by multitudinous

examples of it. Sometimes Edwin would almost be persuaded to think that he might safely indulge any caprice whatever under his father's nose, and then the old man would notice some unusual trifle of no conceivable importance, and go into a passion about it, and Maggie would say quietly, "I told you what would be happening one of these days," which would annoy Edwin. His annoyance was caused less by Maggie's 'I told you so,' than by her lack of logic. If his father had ever overtaken him in some large and desperate caprice, such as the purchase of the gas-stove on the paternal account, he would have submitted in meekness to Maggie's triumphant reminder; but his father never did. It was always upon some perfectly innocent nothing, which the timidest son might have permitted himself, that the wrath of Darius overwhelmingly burst.

Maggie and Edwin understood each other on the whole very well. Only in minor points did their sympathy fail. And as Edwin would be exasperated because Maggie's attitude towards argument was that of a woman, so would Maggie resent a certain mulishness in him characteristic of the unfathomable stupid sex. Once a week, for example, when his room was 'done out,' there was invariably a skirmish between them, because Edwin really did hate anybody to 'meddle among his things.' The derangement of even a brush on the dressing-table would rankle in his mind. Also he was very 'crotchety about his meals,' and on the subject of fresh air. Unless he was sitting in a perceptible draught, he thought he was being poisoned by nitrogen: but when he could see the curtain or blind trembling in the wind he was hygienically at ease. His existence was a series of catarrhal colds, which, however, as he would learnedly explain to Maggie, could not be connected, in the brain of a reasonable person, with currents of fresh air. Maggie mutely disdained his science. This, too, fretted him. Occasionally she would somewhat tartly assert that he was a regular old maid. The accusation made no impression on him at all. But when, more than ordinarily exacerbated, she sang out that he was 'exactly like his father,' he felt wounded.

The appearance of his bedroom, and the fact that he enjoyed being in it alone, gave some ground for Maggie's first accusation. A screen hid the bed, and this screen was half covered with written papers of memoranda ; roughly, it divided the room into dormitory and study. The whole chamber was occupied by Edwin's personal goods, great and small, ranged in the most careful order ; it was full ; in the occupation of a young man who was not precociously an old maid, it would have been littered. It was a complex and yet practical apparatus for daily use, completely organized for the production of comfort. Edwin would move about in it with the loving and assured gestures of a creator ; and always he was improving its perfection. His bedroom was his passion.

Often, during the wilderness of the day, he would think of his bedroom as of a refuge, to which in the evening he should hasten. Ascending the stairs after the meal, his heart would run on in advance of his legs, and be within the room before his hand had opened the door. And then he would close the door, as upon the whole tedious world, and turn up the gas, and light the stove with an explosive *plop*, and settle himself. And in the first few minutes of reading he would with distinct, conscious pleasure allow his attention to circle the room, dwelling upon piled and serried volumes, and delighting in orderliness and in convenience. And he would reflect : " This is my life. This is what I shall always live for. This is the best. And why not ? " It seemed to him when he was alone in his bedroom and in the night, that he had respectably well solved the problem offered to him by destiny. He insisted to himself sharply that he was not made for marriage, that he had always known marriage to be impossible for him, that what had happened was bound to have happened. For a few weeks he had lived in a fool's paradise : that was all . . . Fantastic scheme, mad self deception ! In such wise he thought of his love-affair. His profound satisfaction was that none except his father knew of it, and even his father did not know how far it had gone. He felt that if the town had been aware of his jilting, he could not have borne the humiliation. To himself he had been horribly humiliated ; but he had recovered in his own esteem.

It was only by very slow processes, by insensible degrees, that he had arrived at the stage of being able to say to his mirror, "I've got over that!" And who could judge better than he? He could trace no mark of the episode in his face. Save for the detail of a moustache, it seemed to him that he had looked on precisely the same unchangeable face for a dozen years. Strange, that suffering had left no sign! Strange, that, in the months just after Hilda's marriage, no acquaintance had taken him on one side and said, "What is the tragedy I can read on your features?"

And indeed the truth was that no one suspected. The vision of his face would remain with people long after he had passed them in the street, or spoken to them in the shop. The charm of his sadness persisted in their memory. But they would easily explain it to themselves by saying that his face had a naturally melancholy cast—a sort of accident that had happened to him in the beginning! He had a considerable reputation of which he was imperfectly aware, for secretiveness, timidity, gentleness, and intellectual superiority. Sundry young women thought of him wistfully when smiling upon quite other young men, and would even kiss him while kissing them, according to the notorious perversity of love.

III

He was reading Swift's "Tale of a Tub" eagerly, tasting with a palate consciously fastidious, and yet catholic, the fine savour of a masterpiece. By his secret enthusiasm, which would escape from him at rare intervals in a word to a friend, he was continuing the reputation of the "Tale of a Tub" from one century towards the next. A classic remains a classic only because a few hundred Edwins up and down England enjoy it so heartily that their pleasure becomes religious. Edwin, according to his programme, had no right to be amusing himself with Swift at that hour. The portly Hallam, whom he found tedious, ought to have been in his hands. But Swift had caught him and would not let him go. Herein was one of the consequences of the pocketableness of Cassell's new series. Edwin had been obliged to agree with Tom

Orgreave (now a married man) that the books were not volumes for a collector; but they were so cheap, and they came from the press so often—once a week, and they could be carried so comfortably over the heart, that he could not resist most of them. His professed idea was that by their aid he could read smaller works in odd moments, at any time, thus surpassing his programme. He had not foreseen that Swift would make a breach in his programme, which was already in a bad way.

But he went on reading tranquilly, despite the damage to it; for in the immediate future shone the hope of the new life, when programmes would never be neglected. In less than a month he would be thirty years of age. At twenty, it had seemed a great age, an age of absolute maturity. Now, he felt as young and as boyish as ever, especially before his father, and he perceived that his vague early notion about the finality of such an age as thirty had been infantile. Nevertheless, the entry into another decade presented itself to him as solemn, and he meant to signalize it by new and mightier resolutions to execute vaster programmes. He was intermittently engaged, during these weeks, in the delicious, the enchanting business of constructing the ideal programme and scheming the spare hours to ensure its achievement. He lived in a dream and illusion of ultimate perfection.

Several times, despite the spell of Swift, he glanced at his watch. The hand went from nine to ten minutes past ten. And then he thought he heard the sound for which he had been listening. He jumped up, abandoned the book with its marker, opened the window wide, and lifting the blind by its rod, put his head out. Yes, he could hear the yelling afar off, over the hill, softened by distance into something gentle and attractive.

“ ‘Signal!’ ‘Signal!’ Special edition! ‘Signal!’ ” And then words incomprehensible.

It came nearer in the night.

He drew down the window and left the room. The mere distant sound of the newsboys' voices had roused him to a pleasing excitement. He fumbled in his pockets. He had neither a halfpenny nor a penny—it was just like him—and

those newsboys with their valuable tidings would not care to halt and weigh out change with a balance.

"Got a halfpenny? Quick!" he cried, running into the kitchen, where Maggie and Mrs. Nixon were engaged in some calm and endless domestic occupation amid linen that hung down whitely.

"What for?" Maggie mechanically asked, feeling the while under her apron.

"Paper," he said.

"At this time of night? You'll never get one at this time of night!" she said, in her simplicity.

"Come *on*!"

He stamped his foot with impatience. It was absolutely astonishing, the ignorance in which Maggie lived, and lived efficiently and in content. Edwin filled the house with newspapers, and she never looked at them, never had the idea of looking at them, unless occasionally at the "Signal" for an account of a wedding or a bazaar. In which case she would glance at the world for an instant with mild *naïveté*, shocked by the horrible things that were apparently going on there, and in five minutes would forget all about it again. Here the whole of England, Ireland, and Scotland was at its front doors that night waiting for newsboys, and to her the night was like any other night! Yet she read many books.

"Here's a penny," she said. "Don't forget to give it me back."

He ran out bareheaded. At the corner of the street somebody else was expectant. He could distinguish all the words now—

"'Signal!' Special edition! Mester Gladstone's Home Rule Bill. Full report. Gladstone's speech. Special!"

The dark running figures approached, stopping at frequent gates, and their hoarse voices split the night. The next moment they had gone by, in a flying column, and Edwin and the other man found themselves with fluttering paper in their hands, they knew not how! It was the most unceremonious snatch-and-thrust transaction that could be imagined. Bleakridge was silent again, and its gates closed, and the shouts were descending violently into Bursley.

"Where's father?" Maggie called out when she heard Edwin in the hall.

"Hasn't he come in yet?" Edwin replied negligently, as he mounted the stairs with his desire.

In his room he settled himself once more under the gas, and opened the flimsy newspaper with joy. Yes, there it was—columns, columns, in small type! An hour or two previously Gladstone had been speaking in Parliament, and by magic the whole of his speech, with all the little convolutions of his intricate sentences, had got into Edwin's bedroom. Edwin began to read, as it were voluptuously. Not that he had a peculiar interest in Irish politics! What he had was a passion for great news, for news long expected. He could thrill responsively to a fine event. I say that his pleasure had the voluptuousness of an artistic sensation.

Moreover, the attraction of politics in general was increasing for him. Politics occupied his mind, often obsessing it. And this was so in spite of the fact that he had done almost nothing in the last election, and that the pillars of the Liberal Club were beginning to suspect him of being a weakling who might follow his father into the wilderness between two frontiers.

As he read the speech, slowly disengaging its significance from the thicket of words, it seemed incredible. A parliament in Dublin! The Irish taxing themselves according to their own caprices! The Irish controlling the Royal Irish Constabulary! The Irish members withdrawn from Westminster! A separate nation! Surely Gladstone could not mean it! The project had the same air of unreality as that of his marriage with Hilda. It did not convince. It was too good to be true. It could not materialize itself. And yet, as his glance, flitting from left to right and right to left, eagerly reached the bottom of one column and jumped with a crinkling of paper to the top of the next, and then to the next after that, the sense of unreality did depart. He agreed with the principles of the Bill, and with all its details. Whatever Gladstone had proposed would have received his sympathy. He was persuaded in advance; he concurred in advance. All he lacked was faith. And those sentences, helped by his image of the aged legislator dominating the House, and

by the wondrous legend of the orator's divine power—those long-stretching, majestic, misty sentences gave him faith. Henceforward he was an ardent Home Ruler. Reason might or might not have entered into the affair had the circumstances of it been other; but in fact reason did not. Faith alone sufficed. For ever afterwards argument about Home Rule was merely tedious to him, and he had difficulty in crediting that opponents of it were neither stupid nor insincere. Home Rule was part of his religion, beyond and above argument.

He wondered what they were saying at the Liberal Club, and smiled disdainfully at the thought of the unseemly language that would animate the luxurious heaviness of the Conservative Club, where prominent publicans gathered after eleven o'clock to uphold the State and arrange a few bets with sporting clients. He admitted, as the supreme importance of the night leaped out at him from the printed page, that, if only for form's sake, he ought to have been at the Liberal Club that evening. He had been requested to go, but had refused, because on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, he always spent the evening in study—or in the semblance of study. He would not break that rule even in honour of the culmination of the dazzling career of his political idol. Perhaps another proof of the justice of Maggie's assertion that he was a regular old maid!

He knew what his father would say. His father would be furious. His father in his uncontrolled fury would destroy Gladstone. And such was his father's empire over him that he was almost ready on Gladstone's behalf to adopt an apologetic and slightly shamed attitude to his father concerning this madness of Home Rule—to admit by his self-conscious blushes that it was madness. He well knew that at breakfast the next morning, in spite of any effort to the contrary, he would have a guilty air when his father began to storm. The conception of a separate parliament in Dublin, and of separate taxation, could not stand before his father's anger. . . .

Beneath his window, in the garden, he suddenly heard a faint sound as of somebody in distress.

"What the deuce——!" he exclaimed. "If that isn't the

old man I'm——!" Startled, he looked at his watch. It was after midnight.

IV

As he opened the garden door, he saw, in the porch where had passed his first secret interview with Hilda, the figure of his father as it were awkwardly rising from the step. The gas had not been turned out in the hall, and it gave a feeble but sufficient illumination to the porch and the nearest parts of the garden. Darius stood silent and apparently irresolute with a mournful and even despairing face. He wore his best black suit, and a new silk hat and new black gloves, and in one hand he carried a copy of the "Signal" that was very crumpled. He ignored Edwin.

"Hello, father!" said Edwin persuasively. "Anything wrong?"

The heavy figure moved itself into the house without a word, and Edwin shut and bolted the door.

"Funeral go off all right?" Edwin inquired with as much nonchalance as he could. (The thought crossed his mind: "I suppose he hasn't been having a drop too much, for once in a way? Why did he come round into the garden?")

Darius loosed a really terrible sigh. "Yes," he answered, expressing with a single word the most profound melancholy.

Four days previously Edwin and Maggie had seen their father considerably agitated by an item of gossip, casually received, to which it seemed to them he attached an excessive importance. Namely, that old Shushions, having been found straying and destitute by the authorities appointed to deal with such matters, had been taken to the workhouse and was dying there. Darius had heard the news as though it had been a message brought on horseback in a melodrama. "The Bastille!" he exclaimed, in a whisper, and had left the house on the instant. Edwin, while the name of Shushions reminded him of moments when he had most intensely lived, was disposed to regard the case of Mr. Shushions philosophically. Of course it was a pity that Mr. Shushions should be in the workhouse; but after all, from what Edwin remembered and could surmise, the workhouse would be very much the same as any other house to that senile mentality. Thus

Edwin had sagely argued, and Maggie had agreed with him. But to them the workhouse was absolutely nothing but a name. They were no more afraid of the workhouse than of the Russian secret police; and of their father's early history they knew naught.

Mr. Shushions had died in the workhouse, and Darius had taken his body out of the workhouse, and had organized for it a funeral which was to be rendered impressive by a procession of Turnhill Sunday-school teachers. Edwin's activity in connection with the funeral had been limited to the funeral cards, in the preparation of which his father had shown an irritability more than usually offensive. And now the funeral was over. Darius had devoted to it the whole of Home Rule Tuesday, and had returned to his house at a singular hour and in a singular condition.

And Edwin, loathing sentimentality and full of the wisdom of nearly thirty years, sedately pitied his father for looking ridiculous and grotesque. He knew for a fact that his father did not see Mr. Shushions from one year's end to the next: hence they could not have been intimate friends, or even friends: hence his father's emotion was throughout exaggerated and sentimental. His acquaintance with history and with biography told him that tyrants often carried sentimentality to the absurd, and he was rather pleased with himself for being able thus to correlate the general past and the particular present. What he did not suspect was the existence of circumstances which made the death of Mr. Shushions in the workhouse the most distressing tragedy that could by any possibility have happened to Darius Clayhanger.

"Shall I put the gas out, or will you?" he asked, with kindly secret superiority, unaware, with all his omniscience, that the being in front of him was not a successful steam-printer and tyrannical father, but a tiny ragged boy who could still taste the Bastille skilly and still see his mother weeping round the knees of a powerful god named Shushions.

"I—I don't know," said Darius, with another sigh.

The next instant he sat down heavily on the stairs and began openly to blubber. His hat fell off and rolled about undecidedly.

"By Jove!" said Edwin to himself, "I shall have to treat

this man like a blooming child ! ” He was rather startled, and interested. He picked up the hat.

“ Better not sit there, ” he advised. “ Come into the dining-room a bit. ”

“ What ? ” Darius asked feebly.

“ Is he deaf ? ” Edwin thought, and half shouted : “ Better not sit there. It’s chilly. Come into the dining-room a bit. Come on. ”

Darius held out a hand, with a gesture inexpressibly sad ; and Edwin, almost before he realized what he was doing, took it and assisted his father to his feet and helped him to the twilight dining-room, where Darius fell into a chair. Some bread and cheese had been laid for him on a napkin, and there was a gleam of red in the grate. Edwin turned up the gas, and Darius blinked. His coarse cheeks were all wet.

“ Better have your overcoat off, hadn’t you ? ”

Darius shook his head.

“ Well, will you eat something ? ”

Darius shook his head again ; then hid his face and violently sobbed.

Edwin was not equal to this situation. It alarmed him, and yet he did not see why it should alarm him. He left the room very quietly, went upstairs, and knocked at Maggie’s door. He had to knock several times.

“ Who’s there ? ”

“ I say, Mag ! ”

“ What is it ? ”

“ Open the door, ’ he said.

“ You can come in. ”

He opened the door, and within the darkness of the room he could vaguely distinguish a white bed.

“ Father’s come. He’s in a funny state. ”

“ How ? ”

“ Well, he’s crying all over the place, and he won’t eat, or do anything ! ”

“ All right, ” said Maggie—and a figure sat up in the bed. “ Perhaps I’d better come down. ”

She descended immediately in an ulster and loose slippers. Edwin waited for her in the hall.

"Now, father," she said brusquely, entering the dining-room, "what's amiss?"

Darius gazed at her stupidly. "Nothing," he muttered.

"You're very late, I think. When did you have your last meal?"

He shook his head.

"Shall I make you some nice hot tea?"

He nodded.

"Very well," she said comfortingly.

Soon with her hair hanging about her face and hiding it, she was bending over the gleam of fire, and insinuating a small saucepan into the middle of it, and encouraging the gleam with a pair of bellows. Meanwhile Edwin uneasily ranged the room, and Darius sat motionless.

"Seen Gladstone's speech, I suppose?" Edwin said, daring a fearful topic in the extraordinary circumstances.

Darius paid no heed. Edwin and Maggie exchanged a glance. Maggie made the tea direct into a large cup, which she had previously warmed by putting it upside down on the saucepan lid. When it was infused and sweetened, she tasted it, as for a baby, and blew on it, and gave the cup to her father, who, by degrees, emptied it, though not exclusively into his mouth.

"Will you eat something now?" she suggested.

He would not.

"Very well, then, Edwin will help you upstairs."

From her manner Darius might have been a helpless and half-daft invalid for years.

The ascent to bed was processional; Maggie hovered behind. But at the dining-room door Darius, giving no explanation, insisted on turning back: apparently he tried to speak but could not. He had forgotten his "Signal." Snatching at it, he held it like a treasure. All three of them went into the father's bedroom. Maggie turned up the gas. Darius sat on the bed, looking dully at the carpet.

"Better see him into bed," Maggie murmured quickly to Edwin, and Edwin nodded—the nod of capability—as who should say, "Leave all that to me!" But in fact he was exceedingly diffident about seeing his father into bed.

Maggie departed.

"Now then," Edwin began the business. "Let's get that overcoat off, eh?" To his surprise Darius was most pliant. When the great clumsy figure, with its wet cheeks, stood in trousers, shirt, and socks, Edwin said, "You're all right now, aren't you?" And the figure nodded.

"Well, good night."

Edwin came out on to the landing, shut the door, and walked about a little in his own room. Then he went back to his father's room. Maggie's door was closed. Darius was already in bed, but the gas was blazing at full.

"You've forgotten the gas," he said lightly and pleasantly, and turned it down to a blue point.

"I say, lad," the old man stopped him, as he was finally leaving.

"Yes?"

"What about that Home Rule?"

The voice was weak, infantile. Edwin hesitated. The "Signal" made a patch of white on the ottoman.

"Oh!" he answered soothingly, and yet with condescension, "it's much about what everybody expected. Better leave that till to-morrow."

He shut the door. The landing received light through the open door of his bedroom and from the hall below. He went downstairs, bolted the front door, and extinguished the hall gas. Then he came softly up and listened at his father's door. Not a sound! He entered his own room and began to undress, and then, half clothed, crept back to his father's door. Now he could hear a heavy irregular snoring.

"Devilish odd, all this!" he reflected, as he got into bed. Assuredly he had disconcerting thoughts, not all unpleasant. His excitement had even an agreeable, zestful quality.

CHAPTER II

THE CONCLAVE

I

THE next morning Edwin overslept himself. He seldom rose easily from his bed, and his first passage down Trafalgar Road to business was notoriously hurried; the whole thoroughfare was acquainted with its special character. Often his father arrived at the shop before him, but Edwin's conscience would say that of course if Darius went down early for his own passion and pleasure, that was Darius's affair. Edwin's official time for beginning work was half-past eight. And at half-past eight, on this morning, he was barely out of the bath. His lateness, however, did not disturb him; there was an excuse for it. He hoped that his father would be in bed, and decided that he must go and see, and, if the old man was still sufficiently pliant, advise him to stay where he was until he had had some food.

But, looking out of the window over a half-buttoned collar, he saw his father dressed and in the garden. Darius had resumed the suit of broadcloth, for some strange reason, and was dragging his feet with painful, heavy slowness along the gravel at the south end of the garden. He carried in his left hand the "Signal," crumpled. A cloth cap, surmounting the ceremonious suit, gave to his head a ridiculous appearance. He was gazing at the earth with an expression of absorbed and acute melancholy. When he reached the end of the path, he looked round, at a loss, then turned, as if on an inefficient pivot, and set himself in motion again. Edwin was troubled by this singular episode. And yet his reason argued with his instinct to the effect that he ought not to be troubled. Evidently the sturdy Darius was not ill.

Nothing serious could be the matter. He had been harrowed and fatigued by the funeral; no more. In another day, doubtless, he would be again the harsh employer astoundingly concentrated in affairs and impervious to the emotional appeal of aught else. Nevertheless he made a strange sight, parading his excessive sadness there in the garden.

A knock at Edwin's door! He was startled. "Hold on!" he cried, went to the door, and cautiously opened it. Maggie was on the mat.

"Here's Auntie Clara!" she said in a whisper, perturbed. "She's come about father. Shall you be long?"

"About father? What about father?"

"It seems she saw him last night. He called there. And she was anxious."

"Oh! I see!" Edwin affected to be relieved. Maggie nodded, also affecting, somewhat eagerly, to be relieved. But neither of them was relieved. Auntie Clara calling at half-past eight! Auntie Clara neglecting that which she never neglected—the unalterable and divinely appointed rites for the daily cleansing and ordering of her abode!

"I shall be down in ten secs," said he. "Father's in the garden," he added, almost kindly. "Seems all right."

"Yes," said Maggie, with cheerfulness, and went. He closed the door.

II

Mrs. Hamps was in the drawing-room. She had gone into the drawing-room because it was more secret, better suited to conversation of an exquisite privacy than the dining-room—a public resort at that hour. Edwin perceived at once that she was savouring intensely the strangeness of the occasion, inflating its import and its importance to the largest possible.

"Good morning, dear," she greeted him in a low and significant tone. "I felt I must come up at once. I couldn't fancy any breakfast till I'd been up, so I put on my bonnet and mantle and just came. It's no use fighting against what you feel you must do."

"But——"

"Hasn't Maggie told you? Your father called to see me

last night just after I'd gone upstairs. In fact I'd begun to get ready for bed. I heard the knocking and I came down and lit the gas in the lobby. 'Who's there?' I said. There wasn't any answer, but I made sure I heard some one crying. And when I opened the door, there was your father. 'Oh!' he said. 'Happen you've gone to bed, Clara?' 'No,' I said. 'Come in, do!' But he wouldn't. And he looked so queer. I never saw him look like that before. He's such a strong self-controlled man. I knew he'd been to poor Mr. Shushions's funeral. 'I suppose you've been to the funeral, Darius,' I said. And as soon as I said that he burst out crying, and half tumbled down the steps, and off he went! I couldn't go after him, as I was. I didn't know *what* to do. If anything happened to your father, I don't know *what* I should do."

"What time was that?" Edwin asked, wondering what on earth she meant—"if anything happened to your father"!

"Half-past ten or hardly. What time did he come home? Very, very late, wasn't it?"

"A little after twelve," he said carelessly. He was sorry that he had inquired as to the hour of the visit to his aunt. Obviously she was ready to build vast and terrible conjectures upon the mysterious interval between half-past ten and midnight.

"You've cut yourself, my dear," she said, indicating with her gloved hand Edwin's chin. "And I'm not surprised. How upsetting it is for you! Of course Maggie's the eldest, and we think a great deal of her, but you're the son—the only son!"

"I know," he said, meaning that he knew he had cut himself, and he pressed his handkerchief to his chin. Within, he was blasphemously fuming. The sentimental accent with which she had finally murmured 'the only son' irritated him extremely. What in the name of God was she driving at? The fact was that, enjoying a domestic crisis with positive sensuality, she was trying to manufacture one! That was it! He knew her. There were times when he could share all Maggie's hatred of Mrs. Hamps, and this was one of those times. The infernal woman, with her shaking plumes and

her odour of black kid, was enjoying herself ! In the thousandth part of a second he invented horrible and grotesque punishments for her, as that all the clothes should suddenly fall off that prim, widowed, odious modesty. Yet, amid the multitude of his sensations—the smarting of his chin, the tingling of all his body after the bath, the fresh vivacity of the morning, the increased consciousness of his own ego, due to insufficient sleep, the queerness of being in the drawing-room at such an hour in conspiratorial talk, the vague disquiet caused at midnight, and now intensified despite his angry efforts to avoid the contagion of Mrs. Hamps's mood, and above all the thought of his father gloomily wandering in the garden—amid these confusing sensations, it was precisely an idea communicated to him by his annoying aunt, an obvious idea, an idea not worth uttering, that emerged clear and dramatic: he was the only son.

“There's no need to worry,” he said as firmly as he could. “The funeral got on his nerves, that's all. He certainly did seem a bit knocked about last night, and I shouldn't have been surprised if he'd stayed in bed to-day. But you see he's up and about.” Both of them glanced at the window, which gave on the garden.

“Yes,” murmured Mrs. Hamps, unconvinced. “But what about his crying? Maggie tells me he was——”

“Oh!” Edwin interrupted her almost roughly. “That's nothing. I've known him cry before.”

“Have you?” She seemed taken aback.

“Yes. Years ago. That's nothing fresh.”

“It's true he's very sensitive,” Mrs. Hamps reflected. “That's what we don't realize, maybe, sometimes. Of course if you think he's all right——”

She approached the window, and, leaning over the tripod which held a flower-pot enveloped in pink paper, she drew the white curtain aside, and gazed forth in silence. Darius was still pacing up and down the short path at the extremity of the garden; his eyes were still on the ground, and his features expressive of mournful despair, and at the end of the path he still turned his body round with slow and tedious hesitations. Edwin also could see him through the window. They both watched him; it was as if they were spying on him.

Maggie entered, and said, in an unusual flutter—
“ Here’s Clara and Albert ! ”

III

Clara and her husband came immediately into the drawing-room. The wife, dressed with a certain haste and carelessness, was carrying in her arms her third child, yet unweaned, and she expected a fourth in the early autumn. Clara had matured, she had grown stronger ; and despite the asperity of her pretty, pale face there was a charm in the free gestures and the large body of the young and prolific mother. Albert Benbow wore the rough, clay-dusted attire of the small earthenware manufacturer who is away from the works for half an hour. Both of them were electrically charged with importance.

Amid the general self-consciousness Maggie took the baby, and Clara and Mrs. Hamps kissed each other tenderly, as though saying, “ Affliction is upon us.” It was impossible, in the circumstances, to proceed to minute inquiry about the health of the children, but Mrs. Hamps expressed all her solicitude in a look, a tone, a lingering of lip on lip. The years were drawing together Mrs. Hamps and her namesake. Edwin was often astonished at the increasing resemblance of Clara to her aunt, with whom, thanks to the unconscious intermediacy of babies, she was even indeed quite intimate. The two would discuss with indefatigable gusto all the most minute physical details of motherhood and infancy : and Auntie Clara’s presents were worthy of her reputation.

As soon as the kiss was accomplished—no other greeting of any kind occurred—Clara turned sharply to Edwin—

“ What’s this about father ? ”

“ Oh ! He’s had a bit of a shock. He’s pretty much all right to-day.”

“ Because Albert’s just heard——” She looked at Albert.

Edwin was thunderstruck. Was the tale of his father’s indisposition spread all over the Five Towns ? He had thought that the arrival of Clara and her husband must be due to Auntie Hamps having called at their house on her way up to Bleakridge. But now he could see, even from his auntie’s

affrighted demeanour alone, that the Benbows' visit was an independent affair.

"Are you sure he's all right?" Albert questioned, in his superiorly sagacious manner, which mingled honest bullying with a little good-nature.

"Because Albert just heard——" Clara put in again.

The company then heard what Albert had just heard. At his works before breakfast an old hollow-ware presser, who lived at Turnhill, had casually mentioned that his father-in-law, Mr. Clayhanger, had been cutting a very peculiar figure on the previous evening at Turnhill. The hollow-ware presser had seen nothing personally; he had only been told. He could not or would not particularize. Apparently he possessed in a high degree the local talent for rousing an apprehension by the offer of food, and then under ingenious pretexts refusing the food. At any rate, Albert had been startled, and had communicated his alarm to Clara. Clara had meant to come up a little later in the morning, but she wanted Albert to come with her, and Albert, being exceedingly busy, had only the breakfast half-hour of liberty. Hence they had set out instantly, although the baby required sustenance; Albert having suggested that Clara could feed the baby just as well at her father's as at home.

Before the Benbow story was quite finished it became entangled with the story of Mrs. Hamps, and then with Edwin's story. They were all speaking at once, except Maggie, who was trying to soothe the baby.

Holding forth her arms, Clara, without ceasing to talk rapidly and anxiously to Mrs. Hamps, without even regarding what she did, took the infant from her sister, held it with one hand, and with the other loosed her tight bodice, and boldly exposed to the greedy mouth the magnificent source of life. As the infant gurgled itself into silence, she glanced with a fleeting ecstatic smile at Maggie, who smiled back. It was strange how Maggie, now midway between thirty and forty, a tall, large-boned, plump, mature woman, efficient, kindly, and full of common sense—it was strange how she always failed to assert herself. She listened now, not seeking notice and assuredly not receiving it.

Edwin felt again the implication, first rendered by his aunt,

and now emphasized by Clara and Albert, that the responsibility of the situation was upon him, and that everybody would look to him to discharge it. He was expected to act, somehow, on his own initiative, and to do something.

"But what is there to do?" he exclaimed, in answer to a question.

"Well, hadn't he better see a doctor?" Clara asked, as if saying ironically, "Hasn't it occurred to you even yet that a doctor ought to be fetched?"

Edwin protested with a movement of impatience—

"What on earth for? He's walking about all right."

They had all been surreptitiously watching Darius from behind the curtains.

"Doesn't seem to be much the matter with him now! That I must say!" agreed Albert, turning from the window.

Edwin perceived that his brother-in-law was ready to execute one of those changes of front which lent variety to his positiveness, and he addressed himself particularly to Albert, with the persuasive tone and gesture of a man to another man in a company of women—

"Of course there doesn't! No doubt he was upset last night. But he's getting over it. *You* don't think there's anything in it, do you, Maggie?"

"I don't," said Maggie calmly.

These two words had a great effect.

"Of course, if we're going to listen to every tale that's flying about a potbank——" said Edwin.

"You're right there, Teddy!" the brother-in-law heartily concurred. "But Clara thought we'd better——"

"Certainly," said Edwin pacifically, admitting the entire propriety of the visit.

"Why's he wearing his best clothes?" Clara demanded suddenly. And Mrs. Hamps showed a sympathetic appreciation of the importance of the question.

"Ask me another!" said Edwin. "But you can't send for a doctor because a man's wearing his best clothes."

Maggie smiled, scarce perceptibly. Albert gave a guffaw. Clara was slightly irritated.

"Poor little dear!" murmured Mrs. Hamps, caressing the baby. "Well, I must be going," she sighed.

"We shall see how he goes on," said Edwin, in his rôle of responsible person.

"Perhaps it will be as well if you say nothing about us calling," whispered Mrs. Hamps. "We'll just go quietly away. You can give a hint to Mrs. Nixon. Much better he shouldn't know."

"Oh! much better!" said Clara.

Edwin could not deny this. Yet he hated the chicane. He hated to observe on the face of the young woman and of the old their instinctive impulses towards chicane, and their pleasure in it. The whole double visit was subtly offensive to him. Why should they gather like this at the first hint that his father was not well? A natural affectionate anxiety. . . . Yes, of course, that motive could not be denied. Nevertheless, he did not like the tones and the gestures, and the whisperings and oblique glances of their gathering.

IV

In the middle of a final miscellaneous conversation, Albert said—

"We'll better be off."

"Wait a moment," said Clara, with a nod to indicate the still busy infant.

Then the door opened, very slowly and cautiously, and as they all observed the movement of the door, they all fell into silence. Darius himself appeared. Unobserved, he had left the garden and come into the house. He stood in the doorway, motionless, astounded, acutely apprehensive, and with an expression of the most poignant sadness on his harsh, coarse, pimpled face. He still wore the ridiculous cap and held the newspaper. The broadcloth suit was soiled. His eye wandered among his family, and it said, terrorized, and yet feebly defiant, "What are they plotting against me? Why are they all here like this?"

Mrs. Hamps spoke first—

"Well, father, we just popped in to see how you were after all that dreadful business yesterday. Of course I quite understand you didn't want to come in last night. You weren't equal to it." The guilty crude sweetness of her cajoling

voice grated excruciatingly on both Edwin and Maggie. It would not have deceived even a monarch.

Darius screwed himself round, and silently went forth again.

"Where are you going, father?" asked Clara.

He stopped, but his features did not relax.

"To the shop," he muttered. His accents were of the most dreadful melancholy.

Everybody was profoundly alarmed by his mere tone and look. This was not the old Darius. Edwin felt intensely the futility and the hollowness of all those reassurances which he had just been offering.

"You haven't had your breakfast, father," said Maggie quietly.

"Please, father! Please don't go like that. You aren't fit," Clara entreated, and rushed towards him, the baby in her arms, and with one hand took his sleeve. Mrs. Hamps followed, adding persuasions. Albert said bluffly, "Now, dad! Now, dad!"

Edwin and Maggie was silent in the background.

Darius gazed at Clara's face, and then his glance fell, and fixed itself on her breast and on the head of the powerfully sucking infant, and then it rose to the plumes of Mrs. Hamps. His expression of tragic sorrow did not alter in the slightest degree under the rain of sugared remonstrances and cajoleries that the two women directed upon him. And then, without any warning, he burst into terrible tears, and, staggering, leaned against the wall. He was half carried to the sofa, and sat there, ineffably humiliated. One after another looked reproachfully at Edwin, who had made light of his father's condition. And Edwin was abashed and frightened.

"You or I had better fetch th' doctor," Albert muttered.

CHAPTER III

THE NAME

I

“**H**E mustn’t go near business,” said Mr. Alfred Heve, the doctor, coming to Edwin, who was waiting in the drawing-room, after a long examination of Darius.

Mr. Heve was not wearing that gentle and refined smile which was so important a factor in the treatment of his patients and their families, and which he seemed to have caught from his elder brother, the vicar of St. Peter’s. He was a youngish man, only a few years older than Edwin himself, and Edwin’s respect for his ability had limits. There were two other doctors in the town whom Edwin would have preferred, but Mr. Heve was his father’s choice, notable in the successful soothing of querulous stomachs, and it was inevitably Mr. Heve who had been summoned. He had arrived with an apprehensive, anxious air. There had been a most distinct nervousness in his voice when, in replying to Edwin’s question, he had said, “Perhaps I’d better see him quite alone.” Edwin had somehow got it into his head that he would be present at the interview. In shutting the dining-room door upon Edwin, Mr. Heve had nodded timidly in a curious way, highly self-conscious. And that dining-room door had remained shut for half an hour. And now Mr. Heve had emerged with the same embarrassment.

“Whether he wants to or not?” Edwin suggested, with a faint smile.

“On no account whatever!” said the doctor, not answering the smile, which died.

They were standing together near the door. Edwin had his fingers on the handle. He wondered how he would prevent his father from going to business, if his father should decide to go.

"But I don't think he'll be very keen on business," the doctor added.

"You don't?"

Mr. Heve slowly shook his head. One of Mr. Heve's qualities that slightly annoyed Edwin was his extraordinary discretion. But then Edwin had always regarded the discreetness of doctors as exaggerated. Why could not Heve tell him at once fully and candidly what was in his mind? He had surely the right to be told! . . . Curious! And yet far more curious than Mr. Heve's unwillingness to tell, was Edwin's unwillingness to ask. He could not bring himself to demand bluntly of Heve: "Well, what's the matter with him?"

"I suppose it's shock," Edwin ventured.

Mr. Heve lifted his chin. "Shock may have had a little to do with it," he answered doubtfully.

"And how long must he be kept off business?"

"I'm afraid there's not much chance of him doing any more business," said Mr. Heve.

"Really!" Edwin murmured. "Are you sure?"

"Quite."

Edwin did not feel the full impact of this prophecy at the moment. Indeed, it appeared to him that he had known since the previous midnight of his father's sudden doom; it appeared to him that the first glimpse of his father after the funeral had informed him of it positively. What impressed him at the moment was the unusual dignity which characterized Mr. Heve's embarrassment. He was beginning to respect Mr. Heve.

"I wouldn't care to give him more than two years," said Mr. Heve, gazing at the carpet, and then lifting his eyes to Edwin's.

Edwin flushed. And this time his 'Really!' was startled.

"Of course you may care to get other advice," the doctor went on. "I shall be delighted to meet a specialist. But I tell you at once my opinion." This with a gesture of candour.

"Oh!" said Edwin. "If you're sure——"

Strange that the doctor would not give a name to the disease! Most strange that Edwin even now could not demand the name.

"I suppose he's in his right *mind*?" said Edwin.

"Yes," said the doctor. "He's in his right mind." But he gave the reply in a tone so peculiar that the affirmative was almost as disconcerting as a negative would have been.

"Just rest he wants?" said Edwin.

"Just rest. And looking after. I'll send up some medicine. He'll like it." Mr. Heve glanced absently at his watch. "I must be going."

"Well——" Edwin opened the door.

Then with a sudden movement Mr. Heve put out his hand.

"You'll come in again soon?"

"Oh yes."

In the hall they saw Maggie about to enter the dining-room with a steaming basin.

"I'm going to give him this," she said simply in a low voice. "It's so long to dinner-time."

"By all means," said Mr. Heve, with his little formal bow.

"You've finished seeing him then, doctor?"

He nodded.

"I'll be back soon," said Edwin to Maggie, taking his hat from the rack. "Tell father if he asks I've run down to the shop."

She nodded and disappeared.

"I'll walk down a bit of the way with you," said Mr. Heve.

His trap, which was waiting at the corner, followed them down the road. Edwin could not begin to talk. And Mr. Heve kept silence. Behind him, Edwin could hear the jingling of metal on Mr. Heve's sprightly horse. After a couple of hundred yards the doctor stopped at a house-door.

"Well——" He shook hands again, and at last smiled with sad sweetness.

"He'll be a bit difficult to manage, you know," said Edwin.

"I don't think so," said the doctor.

"I'll let you know about the specialist. But if you're sure——"

The doctor waved a deprecating hand. It might have been the hand of his brother, the Vicar.

II

Edwin proceeded towards the town, absorbed in a vision of his father seated in the dining-room, inexpressibly melan-

choly, and Maggie with her white apron bending over him to offer some nice soup. It was a desolating vision—and yet he wondered why it should be! Whenever he reasoned he was always inimical to his father. His reason asked harshly why he should be desolated, as he undoubtedly was. The prospect of freedom, of release from a horrible and humiliating servitude—this prospect ought to have dazzled and uplifted him, in the safe, inviolable privacy of his own heart. But it did not. . . . What a chump the doctor was, to be so uncommunicative! And he himself! . . . By the way, he had not told Maggie. It was like her to manifest no immediate curiosity, to be content to wait. . . . He supposed he must call at his aunt's, and even at Clara's. But what should he say when they asked him why he had not asked the doctor for a name?

Suddenly an approaching man whose face was vaguely familiar but with whom he had no acquaintance whatever, swerved across the footpath and stopped him.

"What's amiss with th' old gentleman?"

It was astounding how news flew in the town!

"He's not very well. Doctor's ordered him a rest."

"Not in bed, is he?"

"Oh no!" Edwin lightly scorned the suggestion.

"Well, I do hope it's nothing serious. Good morning."

III

Edwin was detained a long time in the shop by a sub-manager from Bostocks in Hanbridge who was waiting, and who had come about an estimate for a rather considerable order. This man desired a decrease of the estimate and an increased speed in execution. He was curt. He was one business firm offering an ultimatum to another business firm. He asked Edwin whether Edwin could decide at once. Edwin said 'Certainly,' using a tone that he had never used before. He decided. The man departed, and Edwin saw him spring on to the Hanbridge car as it swept down the hill. The man would not have been interested in the news that Darius Clayhanger had been to business for the last time. Edwin was glad of the incident because it had preserved him from embarrassed conversation with Stifford. Two hours earlier

he had called for a few moments at the shop, and even then, ere Edwin had spoken, Stifford's face showed that he knew something sinister had occurred. With a few words of instruction to Stifford, he now went through towards the workshops to speak with Big James about the Bostock order.

All the workmen and apprentices were self-conscious. And Edwin could not speak naturally to Big James. When he had come to an agreement with Big James as to the execution of the order, the latter said—

“Would you step below a minute, Mr. Edwin?”

Edwin shuffled. But Big James's majestic politeness gave to his expressed wish the force of a command. Edwin preceded Big James down the rough wooden stair to the ground floor, which was still pillared with supporting beams. Big James, with deliberate, careful movements, drew the trap-door horizontal as he descended.

“Might I ask, sir, if Master's in a bad way?” he inquired, with solemn and delicate calm. But he would have inquired about the weather in the same fashion.

“I'm afraid he is,” said Edwin, glancing nervously about at the litter, and the cobwebs, and the naked wood, and the naked earth. The vibration of a treadle-machine above them put the place in a throb.

Astounding! Everybody knew or guessed everything! How?

Big James wagged his head and his grandiose beard, now more grey than black, and he fingered his apron.

“I believe in herbs myself,” said Big James. “But this here softening of the brain—well——”

That was it! Softening of the brain! What the doctor had not told him he had learned from Big James. How it happened that Big James was in a position to tell him he could not comprehend. But he was ready now to believe that the whole town had acquired by magic the information which fate or original stupidity had kept from him alone. . . . Softening of the brain!

“Perhaps I'm making too bold, sir,” Big James went on. “Perhaps it's not so bad as that. But I did hear——”

Edwin nodded confirmingly.

"You needn't talk about it," he murmured, indicating the first floor by an upward movement of the head.

"That I shall not, sir," Big James smoothly replied, and proceeded in the same bland tone: "And what's more, never will I raise my voice in song again! James Yarlett has sung his last song."

There was silence. Edwin, accustomed though he was to the mildness of Big James's deportment, did not on the instant grasp that the man was seriously announcing a solemn resolve made under deep emotion. But as he understood, tears came into Edwin's eyes and he thrilled at the swift and dramatic revelation of the compositor's feeling for his employer. Its impressiveness was overwhelming and it was humbling. Why this excess of devotion?

"I don't say but what he had his faults like other folk," said Big James. "And far be it from me to say that you, Mr. Edwin, will not be a better master than your esteemed father. But for over twenty years I've worked for him, and now he's gone, never will I lift my voice in song again!"

Edwin could not reply.

"I know what it is," said Big James, after a pause.

"What, what is?"

"This ce-re-bral softening. You'll have trouble, Mr. Edwin."

"The doctor says not."

"You'll have trouble, if you'll excuse me saying so. But it's a good thing he's got you. It's a good thing for Miss Maggie as she isn't alone with him. It's a providence, Mr. Edwin, as you're not a married man."

"I very nearly *was* married once!" Edwin cried, with a sudden uncontrollable outburst of feeling which staggered while it satisfied him. Why should he make such a confidence to Big James? Between his pleasure in the relief, and his extreme astonishment at the confession, he felt as it were lost and desperate, as if he did not care what might occur.

"Were you now!" Big James commented, with an ever intensified blandness. "Well, sir, I thank you."

CHAPTER IV

THE VICTIM OF SYMPATHY

I

ON the same evening, Edwin, Albert Benbow, and Darius were smoking Albert's cigarettes in the dining-room. Edwin sat at the end of a disordered suppertable, Albert was standing, hat in hand, near the sideboard, and Darius leaned against the mantelpiece. Nobody could have supposed from his appearance that a doctor had responsibly prophesied this man's death within two years. Except for a shade of sadness upon his face, he looked the same as he had looked for a decade. Though regarded by his children as an old man, he was not old, being in fact still under sixty. His grey hair was sparse ; his spectacles were set upon his nose with the negligence characteristic of age ; but the down-pointing moustache, which, abetted by his irregular teeth, gave him that curious facial resemblance to a seal, showed great force, and the whole of his stiff and sturdy frame showed force. His voice, if not his mouth, had largely recovered from the weakness of the morning. Moreover, the fashion in which he smoked a cigarette had somehow the effect of rejuvenating him. It was Albert who had induced him to smoke cigarettes occasionally. He was not an habitual smoker, consuming perhaps half an ounce a week of pipe-tobacco : and assuredly he would never of his own accord have tried a cigarette. For Darius cigarettes were aristocratic and finicking ; they were an affectation. He smoked a cigarette with the self-consciousness which usually marks the consumption of champagne in certain strata of society. His gestures, as he examined from time to time the end of the cigarette, or audibly blew forth spreading clouds, seemed to signify that in his opinion he was going the pace, cutting a dash, and seeing life. This *naïveté* had its charm.

The three men, left alone by their women, were discussing politics, which then meant nothing but the subject of Home Rule. Darius agreed almost eagerly with everything that Albert Benbow said. Albert was a calm and utterly sound Conservative. He was one of those politicians whose conviction of rightness is so strong that they cannot help condescending towards an opponent. Albert would say persuasively to Liberal acquaintances: "Now just *think* a moment!" apparently sure that the only explanation of their misguided views was that they never had thought for a moment. Or he would say: "Surely all patriotic Liberals——" But one day when Edwin had said to him with a peculiar accent: "Surely all patriotic Conservatives——" he had been politely offended for the rest of the evening, and Edwin and he had not mentioned politics to each other for a long time. Albert had had much influence over his father-in-law. And now Albert said, after Darius had concurred and concurred—

"You're one of the right sort, after all, old gentleman."

Throughout the evening he had spoken to Darius in an unusually loud voice, as though it was necessary to shout to a man who had only two years to live.

"All I say is," said Darius, "country before party!"

"Why, of course!" Albert smiled, confident and superior. "Haven't I been telling you for years you're one of us?"

Edwin, too, smiled, as superiorly as he could, but unhappily not with sufficient superiority to wither Albert's smile. He said nothing, partly from timid discretion, but partly because he was preoccupied with the thought of the malignant and subtle power working secretly in his father's brain. How could the doctor tell? What was the process of softening? Did his father know, in that sick brain of his, that he was condemned; or did he hope to recover? Now, as he leaned against the mantelpiece, protruding his body in an easy posture, he might have been any ordinary man, and not a victim; he might have been a man of business relaxing after a long day of hard and successful cerebral activity.

It seemed strange to Edwin that Albert could talk as he did to one whom destiny had set apart, to one whose being was the theatre of a drama so mysterious and tragic. Yet it was the

proper thing for Albert to do, and Albert did it perfectly, better than anybody, except possibly Maggie.

"Those women take a deuce of a time putting their bonnets on!" Albert exclaimed.

II

The women came downstairs at last. At last, to Edwin's intense relief, every one was going. Albert went into the hall to meet the women. Edwin rose and followed him. And Darius came as far as the door of the dining-room. Less than twenty-four hours had passed since Edwin had begun even to suspect any sort of disaster to his father. But the previous night seemed an age away. The day had been interminable, and the evening exasperating in the highest degree. What an evening! Why had Albert and Clara and Auntie Hamps all of them come up just at supper-time? At first they would not be persuaded! No! They had just called—sheer accident!—nothing abnormal! And yet the whole of the demeanour of Auntie Hamps and Clara was abnormal. Maggie herself, catching the infection, had transformed the meal into a kind of abnormal horrible feast, by serving cold beef and pickles—flesh-meat being unknown to the suppers of the Clayhangers save occasionally on Sundays.

Edwin could not comprehend why the visitors had come. That is to say, he understood the reason quite well, but hated to admit it. They had come from a mere gluttony of curiosity. They knew all that could be known—but still they must come and gaze and indulge their lamentable hearts, and repeat the same things again and again, ten million times! Auntie Hamps, indeed, probably knew more than Edwin did, for she had thought fit to summon Dr. Heve that very afternoon for an ailment of her own, and Clara, with an infant or so, had by a remarkable coincidence called at Mrs. Hamps's house just after the doctor left. "Odious," thought Edwin.

These two had openly treated Darius as a martyr, speaking to him in soft and pitiful voices, urging him to eat, urging him to drink, caressing him, soothing him, humouring him; pretending to be brave and cheerful and optimistic, but with a pretence so poor, so wilfully poor, that it became an insult. When they said fulsomely, "You'll be perfectly all right soon

if only you'll take care and do as the doctor says," Edwin could have risen and killed them both with hearty pleasure. They might just as well have said, "You're practically in your grave." And assuredly they were not without influence on Maggie's deportment. The curious thing was that it was impossible to decide whether Darius loathed, or whether he liked, to be so treated. His face was an enigma. However, he was less gloomy.

Then also the evening had necessarily been full of secret conferences. What would you? Each had to relate privately the things that he or she knew or had heard or had imagined. And there were questions of urgency to be discussed. For example, the question of the specialist. They were all positively agreed, Edwin found, that a specialist was unnecessary. Darius was condemned beyond hope or argument. There he sat, eating and talking, in the large, fine house that he had created out of naught, looking not at all like a corpse; but he was condemned. The doctor had convinced them. Besides, did not everybody know what softening of the brain was? "Of course, if he thinks he would prefer to have a specialist, if he has the slightest wish——" This from Auntie Hamps. There was the question, further, of domestic service. Mrs. Nixon's niece had committed the folly of marriage, and for many months Maggie and the old servant had been 'managing'; but with a crotchety invalid always in the house, more help would be indispensable. And still further—should Darius be taken away for a period to the sea, or Buxton, or somewhere? Maggie said that nothing would make him go, and Clara agreed with her. All these matters, and others, had to be kept away from the central figure; they were all full of passionate interest, and they had to be debated, in tones hushed but excited, in the hall, in the kitchen, upstairs, or anywhere except in the dining-room. The excuses invented by the conspiring women for quitting and entering the dining-room, their fatuous air of innocent simplicity, disgusted Edwin. And he became curter and curter, as he noticed the new deference which even Clara practised towards him.

III

The adieux were distressing. Clara, with her pale sharp face and troubled eyes, clasped Darius round the neck, and almost hung on it. And Edwin thought: "Why doesn't she tell him straight out he's done for?" Then she retired and sought her husband's arm with the conscious pride of a wife fruitful up to the limits set by nature. And then Auntie Hamps shook hands with the victim. These two of course did not kiss. Auntie Hamps bore herself bravely. "Now *do* do as the doctor advises!" she said, patting Darius on the shoulder. "And *do* be guided by these dear children!"

Edwin caught Maggie's eye, and held it grimly.

"And you, my pet," said Auntie Hamps, turning to Clara, who with Albert was now at the door. "You must be getting back to your babies! It's a wonder how you manage to get away! But you're a wonderful arranger! . . . Only don't overdo it. Don't overdo it!"

Clara gave a fatigued smile, as of one whom circumstances often forced to overdo it.

They departed, Albert whistling to the night. Edwin observed again, in their final glances, the queer, new, ingratiating deference for himself. He bolted the door savagely.

Darius was still standing at the entrance to the dining-room. And as he looked at him Edwin thought of Big James's vow never to lift his voice in song again. Strange! It was the idea of the secret strangeness of life that was uppermost in his mind: not grief, not expectancy. In the afternoon he had been talking again to Big James, who, it appeared, had known intimately a case of softening of the brain. He did not identify the case—it was characteristic of him to name no names—but clearly he was familiar with the course of the disease.

He had begun revelations which disconcerted Edwin, and had then stopped. And now as Edwin furtively examined his father, he asked himself: "Will *that* happen to him, and *that*, and those still worse things that Big James did not reveal?" Incredible! There he was, smoking a cigarette, and the clock striking ten in its daily, matter-of-fact way.

Darius let fall the cigarette, which Edwin picked up from the mat, and offered to him.

"Throw it away," said Darius, with a deep sigh.

"Going to bed?" Edwin asked.

Darius shook his head, and Edwin debated what he should do. A moment later, Maggie came from the kitchen and asked—

"Going to bed, father?"

Again Darius shook his head. He then went slowly into the drawing-room and lit the gas there.

"What shall you do? Leave him?" Maggie whispered to Edwin in the dining-room, as she helped Mrs. Nixon to clear the table.

"I don't know," said Edwin. "I shall see."

In ten minutes both Maggie and Mrs. Nixon had gone to bed. Edwin hesitated in the dining-room. Then he extinguished the gas there, and went into the drawing-room. Darius, not having lowered the blinds, was gazing out of the black window.

"You needn't wait down here for me," said he, a little sharply. And his tone was so sane, controlled, firm, and ordinary that Edwin could do nothing but submit to it.

"I'm not going to," he answered quietly.

Impossible to treat a man of such demeanour like a child.

CHAPTER V

THE SLAVE'S FEAR

I

EDWIN closed the door of his bedroom with a sense of relief and of pleasure far greater than he would have admitted ; or indeed could honestly have admitted, for it surpassed his consciousness. The feeling recurred that he was separated from the previous evening by a tremendous expanse of time. He had been flung out of his daily habits. He had forgotten to worry over the execution of his private programmes. He had forgotten even that the solemn thirtieth birthday was close upon him. It seemed to him as if his own egoism was lying about in scattered pieces, which he must collect in the calm of this cloister, and reconstruct. He wanted to resume possession of himself, very slowly, without violent effort. He wound up his watch ; the hour was not yet half-past ten. The whole exquisite night was his.

He had brought with him from the shop, almost mechanically, a copy of " Harper's Magazine," not the copy which regularly once a month he kept from a customer during the space of twenty-four hours for his own uses, but a second copy which had been sent down by the wholesale agents in mistake, and which he could return when he chose. He had already seen the number, but he could not miss the chance of carefully going through it at leisure. Despite his genuine aspirations, despite his taste which was growing more and more fastidious, he found it exceedingly difficult to proceed with his regular plan of reading while there was an illustrated magazine unexplored. Besides, the name of " Harper's " was august. To read " Harper's " was to acquire merit ; even the pictures in " Harper's " were too subtle for the uncultivated.

He turned over the pages, and they all appeared to promise new and strange joys. Such preliminary moments were the

most ecstatic in his life, as in the lives of many readers. He had not lost sight of the situation created by his father's illness, but he could only see it very dimly through the semi-transparent pages.

II

The latch clicked and the door opened slightly. He jumped, supposing that his father had crept upstairs. And the first thought of the slave in him was that his father had never seen the gas-stove and would now infallibly notice it. But Maggie's face showed. She came in very quietly—she, too, had caught the conspiratorial manner.

"I thought you wouldn't be ready for bed just yet," she said, in mild excuse of her entry. "I didn't knock, for fear he might be wandering about and hear."

"Oh!" muttered Edwin. "What's up?" Instinctively he resented the invasion, and was alarmed for the privacy of his sacred room, although he knew that Maggie, and Mrs. Nixon also, had it at their mercy every day. Nobody ever came into that room while he was in it.

Maggie approached the hearth.

"I think I ought to have a stove too," she said pleasantly.

"Well, why don't you?" he replied. "I can get it for you any time." If Clara had envied his stove, she would have envied it with scoffing rancour, and he would have used sarcasm in response.

"Oh no!" said Maggie quickly. "I don't really want one."

"What's up?" he repeated. He could see she was hesitating.

"Do you know what Clara and auntie are saying?"

"No! What now? I should have thought they'd both said enough to last them for a few days at any rate."

"Did Albert say anything to you?"

"What about?"

"Well—both Clara and auntie said I must tell you. Albert says he ought to make his will—they all think so."

Edwin's lips curled.

"How do they know he hasn't made it?"

"Has he made it?"

"How do I know? You don't suppose he ever talks to me about his affairs, do you? Not much!"

"Well—they meant he ought to be asked."

"Well, let 'em ask him, then. I shan't."

"Of course what they say is—you're the——"

"What do I care for that?" he interrupted her. "So that's what you were yarning so long about in your room!"

"I can tell you," said Maggie, "they're both of them very serious about it. So's Albert, it seems."

"They disgust me," he said briefly. "Here the thing isn't a day old, and they begin worrying about his will! They go slobbering all over him downstairs, and upstairs it's nothing but his will they think about. . . . You can't rush at a man and talk to him about his will like that. At least, I can't—it's altogether too thick! I expect some people could. But I can't. Damn it, you must have some sense of decency!"

Maggie remained calm and benevolent. After a pause she said—

"You see—their point is that later on he mayn't be able to make a will."

"Look here," he questioned amicably, meeting her eyes, "what do you think? What do you think yourself?"

"Oh!" she said, "I should never dream of bothering about it. I'm only telling you what——"

"Of course you wouldn't!" he exclaimed. "No decent person would. Later on, perhaps, if one could put in a word casually! But not now! . . . If he doesn't make a will he doesn't make one—that's all."

Maggie leaned against the mantelpiece.

"Mind your skirt doesn't catch fire," he warned her, in a murmur.

"I told them what you'd say," she answered his outburst, perfectly unmoved. "I knew what you'd say. But what they say is—it's all very well for *you*. You're the son, and it seems that if there isn't a will, if it's left too late——"

This aspect of the case had absolutely not presented itself to Edwin.

"If they think," he muttered, with cold acrimony—"if they think I'm the sort of person to take the slightest advantage of being the son—well, they must think it—that's

all! Besides, they can always talk to him themselves—if they're so desperately anxious."

"You have charge of everything."

"Have I! . . . And I should like to know what it's got to do with auntie!"

Maggie lifted her head. "Oh, auntie and Clara, you know—you can't separate them. . . . Well, I've told you."

She moved to leave.

"I say," he stopped her, with a confidential appeal. "Don't you agree with me?"

"Yes," she replied simply. "I think it ought to be left for a bit. Perhaps he's made it, after all. Let's hope so. I'm sure it will save a lot of trouble if he has."

"Naturally it ought to be left for a bit! Why—just look at him! . . . He might be on his blooming dying bed, to hear the way some people talk! Let 'em mention it to me, and I'll tell 'em a thing or two!"

Maggie raised her eyebrows. She scarcely recognized Edwin.

"I suppose he'll be all right, downstairs?"

"Right? Of course he'll be all right!" Then he added, in a tone less pugnacious—for, after all, it was not Maggie who had outraged his delicacy. "Don't latch the door. Pull it to. I'll listen out."

She went silently away.

III

Searching with his body for the most comfortable deeps of the easy chair, he set himself to savour "Harper's." This monthly reassurance that nearly all was well with the world, and that what was wrong was not seriously wrong, waited on his knees to be accepted and to do its office. Unlike the magazines of his youth, its aim was to soothe and flatter, not to disconcert and impeach. He looked at the refined illustrations of South American capitals and of picturesque corners in Provence, and at the smooth or the rugged portraits of great statesmen and great bridges; all just as true to reality as the brilliant letterpress; and he tried to slip into the rectified and softened world offered by the magazine. He did not criticize the presentment. He did nothing so subtle

as to ask himself whether if he encountered the reality he would recognize it from the presentment. He wanted the illusions of "Harper's." He desired the comfort, the distraction, and the pleasant ideal longings which they aroused. But they were a medicine which he discovered he was not in a condition to absorb, a medicine therefore useless. There was no effective medicine for his trouble.

His trouble was that he objected to being disturbed. At first he had been pleasantly excited, but now he shrank away at the call to freedom, to action, to responsibility. All the slave in him protested against the knocking off of irons, and the imperative kick into the open air. He saw suddenly that in the calm of regular habit and of subjection, he had arrived at something that closely resembled happiness. He wished not to lose it, knowing that it was already gone. Actually, for his own sake, and quite apart from his father, he would have been ready, were it possible, to cancel the previous twenty-four hours. Everything was ominous, and he wandering about, lost, amid menaces. . . . Why, even his cherished programmes of reading were smashed. . . . Hallam ! . . . True, to-night was not a night appointed for reading, but to-morrow night was. And would he be able to read to-morrow night ? No, a hundred new complications would have arisen to harass him and to dispossess him of his tranquillity !

Destiny was demanding from him a huge effort, unexpected and formidable, and the whole of his being weakly complained, asking to be exempted, but asking without any hope of success ; for all his faculties and his desires knew that his conscience was ultimately their master.

Talk to his father about making a will, eh ! Besides being disgusting, it was laughable. Those people did not know his father as he did. He foresaw that, even in conducting the routine of business, he would have difficulties with his father over the simplest details. In particular there was one indispensable preliminary to the old man's complete repose, and his first duty on the morrow would be to endeavour to arrange this preliminary with his father ; but he scarcely hoped to succeed.

On the portion of the mantelpiece reserved for books in

actual use lay the "Tale of a Tub," last night so enchanting. And now he had positively forgotten it. He yawned, and prepared for bed. If he could not read "Harper's," perhaps he could read Swift.

IV

He lay in bed. The gas was out, the stove was out, and according to his custom he was reading himself to sleep by the light of a candle in a sconce attached to the bed's head. His eyes ran along line after line and down page after page, and transmitted nothing coherent to his brain.

Then there were steps on the stair. His father was at last coming to bed. He was a little relieved, though he had been quite prepared to go to sleep and leave his father below. Why not? The steps died at the top of the stair, but an irregular creaking continued. After a pause the door was pushed open; and after another pause the figure of his father came into view, breathing loudly.

"Edwin, are you asleep?" Darius asked anxiously. Edwin wondered what could be the matter, but he answered with lightness, "Nearly."

"I've not put th' light out down yon! Happen you'd better put it out." There was in his father's voice a note of dependence upon him, of appeal to him.

"Funny!" he thought, and said aloud, "All right."

He jumped up. His father thudded off deliberately to his own room, apparently relieved of a fearful oppression, but still fixed in sadness.

On the previous night Edwin had extinguished the hall gas and come last to bed; and again to-night. But to-night with what a different sentiment of genuine, permanent, responsibility! The appealing feebleness of his father's attitude seemed to give him strength. Surely a man so weak and fallen from tyranny could not cause much trouble! Edwin now had some hope that the unavoidable preliminary to the invalid's retirement might be achieved without too much difficulty. He braced himself.

CHAPTER VI

KEYS AND CHEQUES

I

COMING up Trafalgar Road at twenty minutes past nine in the bright, astringent morning, Edwin carried by a string a little round parcel which for him contained the inspiring symbol of his new life. By mere accident he had wakened and had risen early, arriving at the shop before half-past seven. He had deliberately lifted on to his shoulders the whole burden of the shop and the printing business, and as soon as he felt its weight securely lodged he became extraordinarily animated and vigorous ; even gay. He had worked with a most agreeable sense of energy until nearly nine o'clock ; and then, having first called at the ironmonger's, had stepped into the Bank at the top of St. Luke's Square a moment after its doors opened, and had five minutes' exciting conversation with the manager. After which, with righteous hunger in his belly and the symbol in his hand, he had come home to breakfast. The symbol was such as could be obtained at any ironmonger's : an alarm clock. Mrs. Nixon had grown less reliable than formerly as an alarm clock ; machinery was now supplanting her.

Dr. Heve came out of the house, and Dr. Heve, too, seemed gay with fine resolutions. The two met on the doorstep, each full of a justifiable self-satisfaction. The doctor explained that he had come thus early because Mr. Clayhanger was one of those cases upon which he could look in casually at any time. In the sunshine they talked under the porch of early rising, as men who understood the value of that art. Edwin could see that Dr. Heve's life was a series of little habits which would never allow themselves to be interfered with by any large interest, and he despised the man's womanish smile. Nevertheless his new respect for him did not weaken ; he decided

that he was a very decent fellow in his way, and he was more impressed than he would admit by the amount of work that the doctor had for years been doing in the morning before his intellectual superiors had sat up in bed. And he imagined that it might be even more agreeable to read in the fresh stillness of the morning than in the solitary night.

Then they returned to the case of Darius. The doctor was more communicative, and they were both cheerfully matter-of-fact concerning it. There it was, to be made the best of! And that Darius could never handle business again, and that in about two years his doom would be accomplished—these were basic facts, axiomatic. The doctor had seen his patient in the garden, and he suggested that if Darius could be persuaded to interest himself in gardening . . . ! They discussed his medicine, his meals, his digestion, and the great, impossible dream of 'taking him away,' 'out of it all.' And every now and then Dr. Heve dropped some little hint as to the management of Darius.

The ticking parcel drew the discreet attention of the doctor. The machine was one guaranteed to go in any position, and was much more difficult to stop than to start.

"It's only an alarm," said Edwin, not without self-consciousness.

The doctor went, tripping neatly and optimistically, off towards his own breakfast. He got up earlier than his horse.

II

Darius was still in the garden when Edwin went to him. He had put on his daily suit, and was leisurely digging in an uncultivated patch of ground. He stuck the spade into the earth perpendicularly and deep, and when he tried to prise it up and it would not yield because of a concealed half-brick, he put his tongue between his teeth and then bit his lower lip, controlling himself, determined to get the better of the spade and the brick by persuasively humouring them. He took no notice whatever of Edwin.

"I see you aren't losing any time," said Edwin, who felt as though he were engaging in small-talk with a stranger.

"Are *you*?" Darius replied, without turning his head.

"I've just come up for a bit of breakfast. Everything's

all right," he said. He would have liked to add: "I was in the shop before seven-thirty," but he was too proud.

After a pause, he ventured, essaying the casual—

"I say, father, I shall want the keys of the desk, and all that."

"Keys o' th' desk!" Darius muttered, leaning on the spade, as though demanding in stupefaction, "What on earth can you want the keys for?"

"Well——" Edwin stammered.

But the proposition was too obvious to be denied. Darius left the spade to stand up by itself, and stared.

"Got 'em in your pocket?" Edwin inquired.

Slowly Darius drew forth a heavy, glittering bunch of keys, one of the chief insignia of his dominion, and began to fumble at it.

"You needn't take any of them off. I expect I know which is which," said Edwin, holding out his hand.

Darius hesitated, and then yielded up the bunch.

"Thanks," said Edwin lightly.

But the old man's reluctance to perform this simple and absolutely necessary act of surrender, the old man's air of having done something tremendous—these signs frightened Edwin and shook his courage for the demand compared to which the demand for the keys was naught. Still, the affair had to be carried through.

"And I say," he proceeded, jingling the keys, "about signing and endorsing cheques. They tell me at the Bank that if you sign a general authority to me to do it for you, that will be enough."

He could not avoid looking guilty. He almost felt guilty, almost felt as if he were plotting against his father's welfare. And as he spoke his words seemed unreal and his suggestion fantastic. At the Bank the plan had been simple, easy, and perfectly natural. But there could be no doubt, that as he had walked up Trafalgar Road, receding from the Bank and approaching his father, the plan had gradually lost those attractive qualities. And now in the garden it was merely monstrous.

Silent, Darius resumed the spade.

"Well," said Edwin desperately, "What about it?"

"Do you think"—Darius glowered upon him with heavy desolating scorn—"do you think as I'm going to let you sign my cheques for me? You're taking too much on yourself, my lad."

'But——'

"I tell ye you're taking too much on yourself!" he began to shout menacingly. "Get about your business and don't act the fool! You needn't think you're going to be God A'mighty because you've got up a bit earlier for once in a way and been down to th' shop before breakfast."

III

In all his demeanour there was not the least indication of weakness. He might never have sat down on the stairs and cried! He might never have submitted feebly and perhaps gladly to the caresses of Clara and the soothings of Auntie Hamps! Impossible to convince him that he was cut off from the world! Impossible even to believe it! Was this the man that Edwin and the Bank manager and the doctor and all the others had been disposing of as though he were an automaton accurately responsive to external suggestion?

"Look here," Edwin knew that he ought to say. "Let it be clearly understood once for all—I'm the boss now! I have the authority in my pocket and you must sign it, and quick too! I shall do my best for you, but I don't mean to be bullied while I'm doing it!"

But he could not say it. Nor could his heart emotionally feel it.

He turned away sheepishly, and then he faced his father again, with a distressed, apologetic smile.

"Well then," he asked, "who *is* going to sign cheques?"

"I am," said Darius.

"But you know what the doctor said! You know what you promised him!"

"What did the doctor say?"

"He said you weren't to do anything at all. And you said you wouldn't. What's more, you said you didn't want to."

Darius sneered.

"I reckon I can sign cheques," he said. "And I reckon I

can endorse cheques. . . . So it's got to that ! I can't sign my own name now. I shall show some of you whether I can't sign my own name ! ”

“ You know it isn't simply signing them. You know if I bring cheques up for you to sign you'll begin worrying about them at once, and—and there'll be no end to it. You'd much better——”

“ Shut up ! ” It was like a clap of thunder.

Edwin hesitated an instant and then went towards the house. He could hear his father muttering “ Whipper-snapper ! ”

“ And I'll tell you another thing,” Darius bawled across the garden—assuredly his voice would reach the street. “ It was like your impudence to go to the Bank like that without asking me first ! ‘ They tell you at the Bank ’ ! ‘ They tell you at the Bank ’ ! Anything else they told you at the Bank ? ” Then a snort.

Edwin was humiliated and baffled. He knew not what he could do. The situation became impossible immediately it was faced. He felt also very resentful, and resentment was capturing him, when suddenly an idea seemed to pull him by the sleeve : “ All this is part of his disease. It's part of his disease that he can't see the point of a thing.” And the idea was insistent, and under its insistence Edwin's resentment changed to melancholy. He said to himself that he must think of his father as a child. He blamed himself, in a sort of pleasurable luxury of remorse, for all the anger which during all his life he had felt against his father. His father's unreasonableness had not been a fault, but a misfortune. His father had been not a tyrant, but a victim. His brain must always have been wrong ! And now he was doomed, and the worst part of his doom was that he was unaware of it. And in the thought of Darius ignorantly blustering within the walled garden, in the spring sunshine, condemned, cut off, helpless at the last, pitiable at the last, there was something inexpressibly poignant. And the sunshine seemed a shame ; and Edwin's youth and mental vigour seemed a shame.

Nevertheless Edwin knew not what to do.

“ Master Edwin,” said Mrs. Nixon, who was rubbing the balustrade of the stairs, “ you munna' cross him like that.”

She jerked her head in the direction of the garden. The garden door stood open.

If he had not felt solemn and superior, he could have snapped off that head of hers.

"Is my breakfast ready?" he asked. He hung up his hat, and absently took the little parcel which he had left on the marble ledge of the umbrella-stand.

CHAPTER VII

LAIID ASIDE

I

THE safe, since the abandonment of the business premises by the family, had stood in a corner of a small nondescript room, sometimes vaguely called the safe-room, between the shop and what had once been the kitchen. It was a considerable safe, and it had the room practically to itself. As Edwin unlocked it, and the prodigious door swung with silent smoothness to his pull, he was aware of a very romantic feeling of exploration. He had seen the inside of the safe before; he had even opened the safe, and taken something from it, under his father's orders. But he had never had leisure, nor licence, to inspect its interior. From his boyhood had survived the notion that it must contain many marvels. In spite of himself his attitude was one of awe.

The first thing that met his eye was his father's large, black-bound private cash-book, which constituted the most sacred and mysterious document in the accountancy of the business. Edwin handled, and kept, all the books save that. At the beginning of the previous week he and Stifford had achieved the task of sending out the quarterly accounts, and of one sort or another there were some seven hundred quarterly accounts. Edwin was familiar with every detail of the printer's work-book, the daybook, the combined book colloquially called 'invoice and ledger,' the 'bought' ledger, and the shop cash-book. But he could form no sure idea of the total dimensions and results of the business, because his father always kept the ultimate castings to himself, and never displayed his private cash-book under any circumstances. By ingenuity and perseverance Edwin might have triumphed over Darius's mania for secrecy; but he did not care to do

so ; perhaps pride even more than honour caused him to refrain.

Now he held the book, and saw that only a portion of it was in the nature of a cash-book ; the rest comprised summaries and general statements. The statement for the year 1885, so far as he could hastily decipher its meaning, showed a profit of £821. He was not surprised, and yet the sight of the figures in his father's heavy, scratchy hand was curiously impressive.

His father could keep nothing from him now. The interior of the safe was like a city that had capitulated ; no law ran in it but his law, and he was absolute ; he could commit infamies in the city and none might criticize. He turned over piles of dusty cheque-counterfoils, and old pass-books and other old books of account. He saw a linen bag crammed with four-shilling pieces (whenever Darius obtained a double florin he put it aside), and one or two old watches of no value. Also the title-deeds of the house at Bleakridge, their latest parchment still white with pounce ; the mortgage, then, had been repaid, a fact which Darius had managed on principle to conceal from his son. Then he came to the four drawers, and in some of these he discovered a number of miscellaneous share-certificates with their big seals. He knew that his father had investments—it was impossible to inhabit the shop-cubicle with his father and not know that—but he had no conception of their extent or their value. Always he had regarded all those matters as foreign to himself, refusing to allow curiosity in regard to them to awake. Now he was differently minded, owing to the mere physical weight in his pocket of a bunch of keys ! In a hasty examination he gathered that the stock was chiefly in railways and shipping, and that it amounted to large sums—anyhow quite a number of thousands. He was frankly astonished. How had his father's clumsy, slow intellect been able to cope with the dangerous intricacies of the Stock Exchange ? It seemed incredible ; and yet he had known quite well that his father was an investor !

“Of course he isn't keen on giving it all up !” Edwin exclaimed aloud suddenly. “I wonder he even forked out the keys as easily as he did !”

The view of the safe enabled him to perform a feat which very few children ever achieve ; he put himself in his father's place. And it was with benevolence, not with exasperation, that he puzzled his head to invent some device for defeating the old man's obstinacy about cheque-signing.

One drawer was evidently not in regular use. Often, in a series of drawers, one of them falls into the idle habit of being overlooked, slipping gradually by custom into desuetude, though other drawers may overflow. This drawer held merely a few scraps of sample paper, and a map, all dusty. He drew forth the map. It was coloured, and in shaky Roman characters underneath it ran the legend, "The County of Staffordshire." He seemed to recognize the map. On the back he read, in his father's handwriting: "Drawn and coloured without help by my son Edwin, aged nine."

He had utterly forgotten it. He could in no detail recall the circumstances in which he had produced the wonderful map. A childish, rude effort ! . . . Still, rather remarkable that at the age of nine (perhaps even before he had begun to attend the Oldcastle Middle School) he should have chosen to do a county map instead of a map of that country beloved by all juvenile map-drawers, Ireland ! He must have copied it from the map in Lewis's Gazetteer of England and Wales. . . . Twenty-one years ago, nearly ! He might, from the peculiar effect on him, have just discovered the mummy of the boy that once had been Edwin. . . . And his father had kept the map for over twenty years. The old cock must have been deuced proud of it once ! Not that he ever said so—Edwin was sure of that !

"Now you needn't get sentimental !" he told himself. Like Maggie, he had a fearful, an almost morbid, horror of sentimentality. But he could not arrest the softening of his heart, as he smiled at the *naïveté* of the map and at his father's parental simplicity.

As he was closing the safe, Stifford, agitated, hurried into the room.

"Please, sir, Mr. Clayhanger's in the Square. I thought I'd better tell you."

"What ? Father ?"

"Yes, sir. He's standing opposite the chapel and he keeps looking this way. I thought you'd like——"

Edwin turned the key, and ran forth, stumbling, as he entered the shop, against the step-ladder which, with the paper-boy at the summit of it, overtopped the doorway. He wondered why he should run, and why Stifford's face was so obviously apprehensive.

II

Darius Clayhanger was standing at the north-east corner of the little Square, half-way up Duck Bank, at the edge of the pavement. And his gaze, hesitant and feeble, seemed to be upon the shop. He merely stood there, moveless, and yet the sight of him was most strangely disconcerting. Edwin, who kept within the shelter of the doorway, comprehended now the look on Stifford's face. His father had the air of ranging round about the shop in a reconnaissance, like an Indian or a wild animal, or like a domestic animal violently expelled. Edwin almost expected him to creep round by the Town Hall into St. Luke's Square, and then to reappear stealthily at the other end of Wedgwood Street, and from a western ambush stare again at his own premises.

A man coming down Duck Bank paused an instant near Darius, and with a smile spoke to him, holding out his hand. Darius gave a slight nod. The man, snubbed and confused, walked on, the smile still on his face but meaningless now and foolish.

At length Darius walked up the hill, his arms stiff and outpointing, as of old. Edwin got his hat and ran after him. Instead of turning to the left along the market-place, Darius kept on farther up the hill, past the Shambles, towards the old playground and the vague cinder-wastes where the town ended in a few ancient cottages. It was at the playground that Edwin, going slowly and cautiously, overtook him.

"Hello, father!" he began nervously. "Where are you off to?"

Darius did not seem to be at all startled to see him at his side. Nevertheless he behaved in a queer fashion. Without saying a word he suddenly turned at right-angles and apparently aimed himself towards the market-place, by the back

of the Town Hall. When he had walked a few paces, he stopped and looked round at Edwin, who could not decide what ought to be done.

"If ye want to know," said Darius, with overwhelming sadness and embittered disgust, "I'm going to th' Bank to sign that authority about cheques."

"Oh!" Edwin responded. "Good! I'll go with you if you like."

"Happen it'll be as well," said Darius, resigning himself.

They walked together in silence.

The old man was beaten. The old man had surrendered, unconditionally. Edwin's heart lightened as he perceived more and more clearly what this surprising victory meant. It meant that always in the future he would have the upper hand. He knew now, and Darius knew, that his father had no strength to fight, and that any semblance of fighting could be treated as bluster. Probably nobody realized as profoundly as Darius himself his real and yet mysterious inability to assert his will against the will of another. The force of his individuality was gone. He who had meant to govern tyrannically to his final hour, to die with a powerful and grim gesture of command, had to accept the ignominy of submission. Edwin had not even insisted, had used no kind of threat. He had merely announced his will, and when the first fury had waned Darius had found his son's will working like a chemical agent in his defenceless mind, and had yielded. It was astounding. And always it would be thus, until the time when Edwin would say 'Do this' and Darius would do it, and 'Do that' and Darius would do it, meekly, unreasoningly, anxiously.

Edwin's relief was so great that it might have been mistaken for positive ecstatic happiness. His mind ranged exultingly over the future of the business. In a few years, if he chose, he could sell the business and spend the whole treasure of his time upon programmes. The entire world would be his, and he could gather the fruits of every art. He would utterly belong to himself. It was a formidable thought. The atmosphere of the market-place contained too much oxygen to be quite grateful to his lungs. . . . In the meantime there were things he would do. He would raise Stifford's wages.

Long ago they ought to have been raised. And he would see that Stifford had for his dinner a full hour ; which in practice Stifford had never had. And he would completely give up the sale and delivery of newspapers and weeklies, and would train the paper-boy to the shop, and put Stifford in his own place and perhaps get another clerk. It struck him hopefully that Stifford might go forth for orders. Assuredly he himself had not one quality of a commercial traveller. And, most inviting prospect of all, he would stock new books. He cared not whether new books were unremunerative. It should be known throughout the Five Towns that at Clayhanger's in Bursley a selection of new books could always be seen. And if people would not buy them people must leave them. But he would have them. And so his thoughts flew.

III

And at the same time he was extremely sad, only less sad than his father. When he allowed his thoughts to rest for an instant on his father he was so moved that he could almost have burst into a sob—just one terrific sob. And he would say in his mind, “ What a damned shame ! What a damned shame ! ” Meaning that destiny had behaved ignobly to his father, after all. Destiny had no right to deal with a man so faithlessly. Destiny should do either one thing or the other. It seemed to him that he was leading his father by a string to his humiliation. And he was ashamed : ashamed of his own dominance and of his father's craven submissiveness. Twice they were stopped by hearty and curious burgesses, and each encounter Edwin, far more than Darius, was anxious to pretend that the harsh hand of Darius still firmly held the sceptre.

When they entered the shining mahogany interior of the richest Bank in the Five Towns, hushed save for a discreet shovelling of coins, Edwin waited for his father to speak, and Darius said not a word, but stood glumly quiescent, like a victim in a halter. The little wiry dancing cashier looked ; every clerk in the place looked ; from behind the third counter, in the far recesses of the Bank, clerks looked over their ledgers ; and they all looked in the same annoying way, as at a victim in a halter ; in their glance was all the pitiful

gloating baseness of human nature, mingled with a little of its compassion.

Everybody of course knew that 'something had happened' to the successful steam-printer.

"Can we see Mr. Lovatt?" Edwin demanded curtly. He was abashed and he was resentful.

The cashier jumped on all his springs into a sudden activity of deference.

Presently the manager emerged from the glazed door of his room, pulling his long whiskers.

"Oh, Mr. Lovatt," Edwin began nervously. "Father's just come along——"

They were swallowed up into the manager's parlour. It might have been a court of justice, or a dentist's surgery, or the cabinet of an insurance doctor, or the room at Fontainebleau where Napoleon signed his abdication—anything but the thing it was. Happily Mr. Lovatt had a manner which never varied; he had only one manner for all men and all occasions. So that Edwin was not distressed either by the deficiencies of amateur acting or by the exhibition of another's self-conscious awkwardness. Nevertheless, when his father took the pen to write, he was obliged to look studiously at the window and inaudibly hum an air. Had he not done so, that threatening sob might have burst its way out of him.

IV

"I'm going this road," said Darius, when they were safely out of the Bank, pointing towards the Sytch.

"What for?"

"I'm going this road," he repeated, gloomily obstinate.

"All right," said Edwin cheerfully. "I'll trot round with you."

He did not know whether he could safely leave his father. The old man's eyes resented his assiduity and accepted it.

They passed the Old Sytch Pottery, the smoke of whose kilns now no longer darkened the sky. The senior partner of the firm which leased it had died, and his sons had immediately taken advantage of his absence to build a new and efficient works down by the canal-side at Shawport—a marvel of everything save architectural dignity. Times changed. Edwin

remarked on the desolation of the place and received no reply. Then the idea occurred to him that his father was bound for the Liberal Club. It was so. They both entered. In the large room two young men were amusing themselves at the billiard-table which formed the chief attraction of the naked interior, and on the ledges of the table were two glasses. The steward in an apron watched them.

"Aye!" grumbled Darius, eyeing the group. "That's Rad, that is! That's Rad! Not twelve o'clock yet!"

If Edwin with his father had surprised two young men drinking and playing billiards before noon in the Conservative Club, he would have been grimly pleased. He would have taken it for a further proof of the hollowness of the opposition to the great Home Rule Bill; but the spectacle of a couple of wastrels in the Liberal Club annoyed and shamed him. His vague notion was that at such a moment of high crisis the two wastrels ought to have had the decency to refrain from wasting.

"Well, Mr. Clayhanger," said the steward, in his absurd boniface way, "you're quite a stranger."

"I want my name taken off this Club," said Darius shortly. "Ye understand me! And I reckon I'm not the only one, these days."

The steward did in fact understand. He protested in a low, amiable voice, while the billiard-players affected not to hear; but he perfectly understood. The epidemic of resignations had already set in, and there had been talk of a Liberal-Unionist Club. The steward saw that the grand folly of a senile statesman was threatening his own future prospects. He smiled. But at Edwin, as they were leaving, he smiled in a quite peculiar way, and that smile clearly meant: "Your father goes dotty, and the first thing he does is to change his politics." This was the steward's justifiable revenge.

"*You* aren't leaving us?" the steward questioned Edwin in a half-whisper.

Edwin shook his head. But he could have killed the steward for that nauseating suggestive smile. The outer door swung to, cutting off the delicate click of billiard balls.

At the top of Duck Bank, Darius silently and without warning mounted the steps of the Conservative Club. Doubt-

less he knew how to lay his hand instantly on a proposer and seconder. Edwin did not follow him.

v

That evening, conscious of responsibility and of virtue, Edwin walked up Trafalgar Road with a less gawky and more dignified mien than ever he had managed to assume before. He had not only dismissed programmes of culture, he had forgotten them. After twelve hours as head of a business, they had temporarily ceased to interest him. And when he passed, or was overtaken by, other men of affairs, he thought to himself naïvely in the dark, "I am the equal of these men." And the image of Florence Simcox the clog-dancer floated through his mind.

He found Darius alone in the drawing-room, in front of an uncustomary fire, garden-clay still on his boots, and "The Christian News" under his spectacles. The Sunday before the funeral of Mr. Shushions had been so unusual and so distressing that Darius had fallen into arrear with his perusals. True, he had never been known to read "The Christian News" on any day but Sunday, but now every day was Sunday.

Edwin nodded to him and approached the fire, rubbing his hands.

"What's this as I hear?" Darius began, with melancholy softness.

"Eh?"

"About Albert wanting to borrow a thousand pounds?" Darius gazed at him over his spectacles.

"Albert wanting to borrow a thousand pounds!" Edwin repeated, astounded.

"Aye! Have they said naught to you?"

"No," said Edwin. "What is it?"

"Clara and your aunt have both been at me since tea. Some tale as Albert can amalgamate into partnership with Hope & Carters if he can put down a thousand. Then Albert's said naught to ye?"

"No, he hasn't!" Edwin exclaimed, emphasizing each word with a peculiar fierceness. It was as if he had said, "I should like to catch him saying anything to me about it!"

He was extremely indignant. It seemed to him monstrous

that those two women should thus try to snatch an advantage from his father's weakness, pitifully mean and base. He could not understand how people could bring themselves to do such things, nor how, having done them, they could ever look their fellows in the face again. Had they no shame? They would not let a day pass; but they must settle on the old man instantly, like flies on a carcass! He could imagine the plottings, the hushed chatterings; the acting-for-the-best demeanour of that cursed woman Auntie Hamps (yes, he now cursed her), and the candid greed of his sister.

"You wouldn't do it, would ye?" Darius asked, in a tone that expected a negative answer; but also with a rather plaintive appeal, as though he were depending on Edwin for moral support against the formidable forces of attack.

"I should not," said Edwin stoutly, touched by the strange wistful note and by the glance. "Unless of course you really want to."

He did not care in the least whether the money would or would not be really useful and reasonably safe. He did not care whose enmity he was risking. His sense of fair play was outraged, and he would salve it at any cost. He knew that had his father not been struck down and defenceless, these despicable people would never have dared to demand money from him. That was the only point that mattered.

The relief of Darius at Edwin's attitude in the affair was painful. Hoping for sympathy from Edwin, he yet had feared in him another enemy. Now he was reassured, and he could hide his feelings no better than a child.

"Seemingly they can't wait till my will's opened!" he murmured, with a scarcely successful affectation of grimness.

"Made a will, have you?" Edwin remarked, with an elaborate casualness to imply that he had never till then given a thought to his father's will, but that, having thought of the question, he was perhaps a very little surprised that his father had indeed made a will.

Darius nodded, quite benevolently. He seemed to have forgotten his deep grievance against Edwin in the matter of cheque-signing.

"Duncalf's got it," he murmured after a moment. Duncalf was the town clerk and a solicitor.

So the will was made ! And he had submissively signed away all control over all monetary transactions. What more could he do, except expire with the minimum of fuss ? Truly Darius, in the local phrase, was now ' laid aside ' ! And of all the symptoms of his decay the most striking and the most tragic, to Edwin, was that he showed no curiosity whatever about business. Not one single word of inquiry had he uttered.

" You'll want shaving," said Edwin, in a friendly way.

Darius passed a hand over his face. He had ceased years ago to shave himself, and had a subscription at Dick Jones's in Aboukir Street, close by the shop.

" Aye ! "

" Shall I send the barber up, or shall you let it grow ? "

" What do you think ? "

" Oh ! " Edwin drawled, characteristically hesitating. Then he remembered that he was the responsible head of the family of Clayhanger. " I think you might let it grow," he decided.

And when he had issued the verdict, it seemed to him like a sentence of sequestration and death on his father. . . . ' Let it grow ! What does it matter ? ' Such was the innuendo.

" You used to grow a full beard once, didn't you ? " he asked.

" Yes," said Darius.

That made the situation less cruel.

CHAPTER VIII

A CHANGE OF MIND

I

ONE evening, a year later, in earliest summer of 1887, Edwin and Mr. Osmond Orgreave were walking home together from Hanbridge. When they reached the corner of the street leading to Lane End House, Osmond Orgreave said, stopping—

“Now you’ll come with us?” And he looked Edwin hard in the eyes, and there was a most flattering appeal in his voice. It was some time since their eyes had met frankly, for Edwin had recently been having experience of Mr. Orgreave’s methods in financial controversy, and it had not been agreeable.

After an instant Edwin said heartily—

“Yes, I think I’ll come. Of course I should like to. But I’ll let you know.”

“To-night?”

“Yes, to-night.”

“I shall tell my wife you’re coming.”

Mr. Orgreave waved a hand, and passed with a certain decorative gaiety down the street. His hair was now silvern, but it still curled in the old places, and his gestures had apparently not aged at all.

Mr. and Mrs. Orgreave were going to London for the Jubilee celebrations. So far as their family was concerned, they were going alone, because Osmond had insisted humorously that he wanted a rest from his children. But he had urgently invited Edwin to accompany them. At first Edwin had instinctively replied that it was impossible. He could not leave home. He had never been to London; a journey to London presented itself to him as an immense enterprise, almost as a piece of culpable self-indulgence. And then, under the stimulus of

Osmond's energetic and adventurous temperament, he had said to himself, "Why not? Why shouldn't I?"

The arguments favoured his going. It was absurd and scandalous that he had never been to London: he ought for his self-respect to depart thither at once. The legend of the Jubilee, spectacular, processional, historic, touched his imagination. Whenever he thought of it, his fancy saw pennons and corslets and chargers winding through stupendous streets, and somewhere in the midst, the majesty of England in the frail body of a little old lady, who had had many children and one supreme misfortune. Moreover, he could incidentally see Charlie. Moreover, he had been suffering from a series of his customary colds, and from overwork, and Heve had told him that he 'would do with a change.' Moreover, he had a project for buying paper in London: he had received, from London, overtures which seemed promising. He had never been able to buy paper quite as cheaply as Darius had bought paper, for the mere reason that he could not haggle over sixteenths of a penny with efficient ruthlessness; he simply could not do it, being somehow ashamed to do it. In Manchester, where Darius had bought paper for thirty years, they were imperceptibly too brutal for Edwin in the harsh realities of a bargain; they had no sense of shame. He thought that in letters from London he detected a softer spirit.

And above all he desired, by accepting Mr. Orgreave's invitation, to show to the architect that the differences between them were really expunged from his mind. Among many confusions in his father's flourishing but disorderly affairs, Edwin had been startled to find the Orgreave transactions. There were accounts and contra-accounts, and quantities of strangely contradictory documents. Never had a real settlement occurred between Darius and Osmond. And Osmond did not seem to want one. Edwin, however, with his old-maid's passion for putting and keeping everything in its place, insisted on one. Mr. Orgreave had to meet him on his strongest point, his love of order. The process of settlement had been painful to Edwin; it had seriously marred some of his illusions. Nearly the last of the entanglements in his father's business, the Orgreave matter was straightened and closed now; and the projected escapade to London would

bury it deep, might even restore agreeable illusions. And Edwin was incapable of nursing malice.

The best argument of all was that he had a right to go to London. He had earned London, by honest and severe work, and by bearing firmly the huge weight of his responsibility. So far he had offered himself no reward whatever, not even an increase of salary, not even a week of freedom, or the satisfaction of a single caprice.

"I shall go, and charge it to the business," he said to himself. He became excited about going.

II

As he approached his house, he saw the elder Heve, vicar of St. Peter's, coming away from it, a natty clerical figure in a straw hat of peculiar shape. Recently this man had called once or twice; not professionally, for Darius was neither a churchman nor a parishioner, but as a brother of Dr. Heve's, as a friendly human being, and Darius had been flattered. The Vicar would talk about Jesus with quiet half-humorous enthusiasm. For him at any rate Christianity was grand fun. He seemed never to be solemn over his religion, like the Wesleyans. He never, with a shamed, defiant air, said, "I am not ashamed of Christ," like the Wesleyans. He might have known Christ slightly at Cambridge. But his relations with Christ did not make him conceited, nor condescending. And if he was concerned about the welfare of people who knew not Christ, he hid his concern in the politest manner. Edwin, after being momentarily impressed by him, was now convinced of his perfect mediocrity; the Vicar's views on literature had damned him eternally in the esteem of Edwin, who was still naïve enough to be unable to comprehend how a man who had been to Cambridge could speak enthusiastically of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Moreover, Edwin despised him for his obvious pride in being a bachelor. The Vicar would not say that a priest should be celibate, but he would, with delicacy, imply as much. Then also, for Edwin's taste, the parson was somewhat too childishly interested in the culture of cellar-mushrooms, which was his hobby. He would recount the tedious details of all his experiments to Darius, who, flattered by these attentions from the Established Church,

took immense delight in the Vicar and in the sample mushrooms offered to him from time to time.

Maggie stood in the porch, which commanded the descent into Bursley; she was watching the Vicar as he receded. When Edwin appeared at the gate, she gave a little jump, and he fancied that she also blushed.

"Look here!" he exclaimed to himself, in a flash of suspicion. "Surely she's not thinking of the Vicar! Surely Maggie isn't after all . . . !" He did not conceive it possible that the Vicar, who had been to Cambridge and had notions about celibacy, was thinking of Maggie. "Women are queer," he said to himself. (For him, this generalization from facts was quite original.) Fancy her staring after the Vicar! She must have been doing it quite unconsciously! He had supposed that her attitude towards the Vicar was precisely his own. He took it for granted that the Vicar's attitude was the same to both of them, based on a polite and kindly but firm recognition that there could be no genuine sympathy between him and them.

"The Vicar's just been," said Maggie.

"Has he? . . . Cheered the old man up at all?"

"Not much." Maggie shook her head gloomily.

Edwin's conscience seemed to be getting ready to hint that he ought not to go to London.

"I say, Mag," he said quietly, as he inserted his stick in the umbrella-stand. She stopped on her way upstairs, and then approached him.

"Mr. Orgreave wants me to go to London with him and Mrs. Orgreave." He explained the whole project to her.

She said at once, eagerly and benevolently—

"Of course you ought to go. It'll do you all the good in the world. I shall be all right here. Clara and Albert will come for Jubilee Day, anyhow. But haven't you driven it late? . . . The day after to-morrow, isn't it? Mr. Heve was only saying just now that the hotels were all crammed."

"Well, you know what Orgreave is! I expect he'll look after all that."

"You go!" Maggie enjoined him.

"Won't upset him?" Edwin nodded vaguely to wherever Darius might be.

"Can't be helped if it does," she replied calmly.

"Well, then, I'm dashed if I don't go! What about my collars?"

III

Those three—Darius, Maggie, and Edwin—sat down to tea in silence. The window was open, and the weather very warm and gay. During the previous twelve months they had sat down to hundreds of such meals. Save for a few brief periods of cheerfulness, Darius had steadily grown more taciturn, heavy and melancholy. In the winter he had of course abandoned his attempts to divert himself by gardening—attempts at the best half-hearted and feeble—and he had not resumed them in the spring. Less than half a year previously he had often walked across the fields to Hillport and back, or up the gradual slopes to the height of Toft End—he never went townwards, had not once visited the Conservative Club. But now he could not even be persuaded to leave the garden. An old wicker arm-chair had been placed at the end of the garden, and he would set out for that arm-chair as upon a journey, and, having reached it, would sink into it with a huge sigh, and repose before bracing himself to the effort of return.

And now it seemed marvellous that he had ever had the legs to get to Hillport and to Toft End. He existed in a stupor of dull reflection, from pride pretending to read and not reading, or pretending to listen and not listening, and occasionally making a remark which was inapposite but which had to be humoured. And as the weeks passed his children's manner of humouring him became increasingly perfunctory, and their movements in putting right the negligence of his attire increasingly brusque. Vainly they tried to remember in time that he was a victim and not a criminal; they would remember after the careless remark and after the curt gesture, when it was too late. His malady obsessed them: it was in the air of the house, omnipresent; it weighed upon them, corroding the nerve and exasperating the spirit. Now and then, when Darius had vented a burst of irrational anger, they would say to each other with casual bitterness that really he was too annoying. Once, when his demeanour to-

wards the new servant had strongly suggested that he thought her name was Bathsheba, Mrs. Nixon herself had 'flown out' at him, and there had been a scene which the doctor had soothed by discreet professional explanations. Maggie's difficulty was that he was always there, always on the spot. To be free of him she must leave the house; and Maggie was not fond of leaving the house.

Edwin meant to inform him briefly of his intention to go to London, but such was the power of habit that he hesitated; he could not bring himself to announce directly this audacious and unprecedented act of freedom, though he knew that his father was as helpless as a child in his hands. Instead, he began to talk about the renewal of the lease of the premises in Duck Square, as to which it would be necessary to give notice to the landlord at the end of the month.

"I've been thinking I'll have it made out in my own name," he said. "It'll save you signing, and so on." This in itself was a proposal sufficiently startling, and he would not have been surprised at a violent instinctive protest from Darius; but Darius seemed not to heed.

Then both Edwin and Maggie noticed that he was trying to hold a sausage firm on his plate with his knife, and to cut it with his fork.

"No, no, father!" said Maggie gently. "Not like that!"

He looked up, puzzled, and then bent himself again to the plate. The whole of his faculties seemed to be absorbed in a great effort to resolve the complicated problem of the plate, the sausage, the knife and the fork.

"You've got your knife in the wrong hand," said Edwin impatiently, as to a wilful child.

Darius stared at the knife and at the fork, and he then sighed, and his sigh meant, "This business is beyond me!" Then he endeavoured to substitute the knife for the fork, but he could not.

"See," said Edwin, leaning over. "Like this!" He took the knife, but Darius would not loose it. "No, leave go!" he ordered. "Leave go! How can I show you if you don't leave go?"

Darius dropped both knife and fork with a clatter. Edwin put the knife into his right hand, and the fork into his left;

but in a moment they were wrong again. At first Edwin could not believe that his father was not indulging deliberately in naughtiness.

"Shall I cut it up for you, father?" Maggie asked, in a mild, persuasive tone.

Darius pushed the plate towards her.

When she had cut up the sausage, she said—

"There you are! I'll keep the knife. Then you can't get mixed up."

And Darius ate the sausage with the fork alone. His intelligence had failed to master the original problem presented to it. He ate steadily for a few moments, and then the tears began to roll down his cheek, and he ate no more.

This incident, so simple, so unexpected, and so dramatic, caused the most acute distress. And its effect was disconcerting in the highest degree. It reminded everybody that what Darius suffered from was softening of the brain. For long he had been a prisoner in the house and garden. For long he had been almost mute. And now, just after a visit which usually acted upon him as a tonic, he had begun to lose the skill to feed himself. Little by little he was demonstrating, by his slow declension from it, the wonder of the standard of efficiency maintained by the normal human being.

Edwin and Maggie avoided one another, even in their glances. Each affected the philosophical, seeking to diminish the significance of the episode. But neither succeeded. Of the two years allotted to Darius, one had gone. What would the second be?

IV

In his bedroom, after tea, Edwin fought against the gloomy influence, but uselessly. The inherent and appalling sadness of existence enveloped and chilled him. He gazed at the rows of his books. He had done no regular reading of late. Why read? He gazed at the screen in front of his bed, covered with neat memoranda. How futile! Why go to London? He would only have to come back from London! And then he said resistingly, "*I will* go to London." But as he said it aloud, he knew well that he would not go. His conscience would not allow him to depart. He could not

leave Maggie alone with his father. He yielded to his conscience unkindly, reluctantly, with no warm gust of unselfishness ; he yielded because he could not outrage his abstract sense of justice.

From the window he perceived Maggie and Janet Orgreave talking together over the low separating wall. And he remembered a word of Janet's to the effect that she and Maggie were becoming quite friendly and that Maggie was splendid. Suddenly he went downstairs into the garden. They were talking in attitudes of intimacy ; and both were grave and mature, and both had a little cleft under the chin. Their pale frocks harmonized in the evening light. As he approached, Maggie burst into a girlish laugh. " Not really ? " she murmured, with the vivacity of a young girl. He knew not what they were discussing, nor did he care. What interested him, what startled him, was the youthful gesture and tone of Maggie. It pleased and touched him to discover another Maggie in the Maggie of the household. Those two women had put on for a moment the charming, chattering silliness of schoolgirls. He joined them. On the lawn of the Orgreaves, Alicia was battling fiercely at tennis with an elegant young man whose name he did not know. Croquet was deposed ; tennis reigned.

Even Alicia's occasional shrill cry had a mournful quality in the languishing beauty of the evening.

" I wish you'd tell your father I shan't be able to go to-morrow," Edwin said to Janet.

" But he's told all of us you *are* going ! " Janet exclaimed.

" Shan't you go ? " Maggie questioned, low.

" No," he murmured. Glancing at Janet, he added, " It won't do for me to go."

" What a pity ! " Janet breathed.

Maggie did not say, " Oh ! But you ought to ! There's no reason whatever why you shouldn't ! " By her silence she contradicted the philosophic nonchalance of her demeanour during the latter part of the meal.

CHAPTER IX

THE OX

I

EDWIN walked idly down Trafalgar Road in the hot morning sunshine of Jubilee Day. He had left his father tearfully sentimentalizing about the Queen. 'She's a good 'un !' Then a sob. 'Never was one like her !' Another sob. 'No, and never will be again !' Then a gush of tears on the newspaper, which the old man laboriously scanned for details of the official programme in London. He had not for months read the newspaper with such a determined effort to understand ; indeed, since the beginning of his illness, no subject, except mushroom-culture, had interested him so much as the Jubilee. Each time he looked at the sky from his shady seat in the garden he had thanked God that it was a fine day, as he might have thanked Him for deliverance from a grave personal disaster.

Except for a few poor flags, there was no sign of gaiety in Trafalgar Road. The street, the town, and the hearts of those who remained in it, were wrapped in that desolating sadness which envelops the provinces when a supreme spectacular national rejoicing is centralized in London. All those who possessed the freedom, the energy, and the money had gone to London to witness a sight that, as every one said to every one, would be unique, and would remain unique for ever—and yet perhaps less to witness it than to be able to recount to their grandchildren that they had witnessed it. Many more were visiting nearer holiday resorts for a day or two days. Those who remained, the poor, spiritless, the afflicted, and the captive, felt with mournful keenness the shame of their utter provinciality, envying the crowds in London with a bitter envy, and picturing London as the paradise of fashion and splendour.

It was from sheer aimless disgust that Edwin went down Trafalgar Road ; he might as easily have gone up. Having

arrived in the town, a wilderness of shut shops, he gazed a moment at his own, and then entered it by the side door. He had naught else to do. Had he chosen he could have spent the whole day in reading, or he might have taken again to his long-neglected water-colours. But it was not in him to put himself to the trouble of seeking contentment. He preferred to wallow in utter desolation, thinking of all the unpleasant things that had ever happened to him, and occasionally conjecturing what he would have been doing at a given moment had he accompanied the jolly, the distinguished, and the enterprising Osmond Orgreave to London.

He passed into the shop, sufficiently illuminated by the white rays that struck through the diamond holes in the shutters. The morning's letters—a sparse company—lay forlorn on the floor. He picked them up and pitched them down in the cubicle. Then he went into the cubicle, and with the negligent gesture of long habit unlocked a part of the desk, the part which had once been his father's privacy, and of which he had demanded the key more than a year ago. It was all now under his absolute dominion. He could do exactly as he pleased with a commercial apparatus that brought in some eight hundred pounds a year net. He was the unquestioned regent, and yet he told himself that he was no happier than when a slave.

He drew forth his books of account, and began to piece figures together on backs of envelopes, using a shorthand of accounts such as a principal will use when he is impatient and not particular to a few pounds. A little wasp of curiosity was teasing Edwin, and to quicken it a comparison was necessary between the result of the first six months of that year and the first six months of the previous year. True, June had not quite expired, but most of the quarterly accounts were ready, and he could form a trustworthy estimate. Was he, with his scorn of his father, his brains, his orderliness, doing better or worse than his father in the business? At the election of 1886, there had been considerably fewer orders than was customary at elections; he had done nothing whatever for the Tories, but that was a point that affected neither period of six months. Sundry customers had assuredly been lost; on the other hand, Stifford's travelling had seemed to

be very satisfactory. Nor could it be argued that money had been dropped on the new-book business, because he had not yet inaugurated the new-book business, preferring to wait ; he was afraid that his father might after all astoundingly walk in one day, and see new books on the counter, and rage. He had stopped the supplying of newspapers, and would deign to nothing lower than a sixpenny magazine ; but the profit on newspapers was negligible.

The totals ought surely to compare in a manner favourable to himself, for he had been extremely and unremittingly conscientious. Nevertheless he was afraid. He was afraid because he knew, vaguely and still deeply, that he could neither buy nor sell as well as his father. It was not a question of brains ; it was a question of individuality. A sense of honour, of fairness, a temperamental generosity, a hatred of meanness, often prevented him from pushing a bargain to the limit. He could not bring himself to haggle desperately. And even when price was not the main difficulty, he could not talk to a customer, or to a person whose customer he was, with the same rough, gruff, cajoling, bullying skill as his father. He could not, by taking thought, do what his father had done naturally, by the mere blind exercise of instinct. His father, with all his clumsiness, and his unscientific methods, had a certain quality, unseizable, unanalysable, and Edwin had not that quality.

He caught himself, in the rapid calculating, giving himself the benefit of every doubt ; somehow, he could not help it, childish as it was. And even so, he could see, or he could feel, that the comparison was not going to be favourable to the regent. It grew plainer that the volume of business had barely been maintained, and it was glaringly evident that the expenses, especially wages, had sensibly increased. He abandoned the figures not quite finished, partly from weary disgust, and partly because Big James most astonishingly walked into the shop, from the back. He was really quite glad to encounter Big James, a fellow-creature.

II

"Seeing the door open, sir," said Big James cheerfully, through the narrow doorway of the cubicle, "I stepped in to see as it was no one unlawful."

"Did I leave the side door open?" Edwin murmured. It was surprising even to himself, how forgetful he was at times, he with his mania for orderliness!

Big James was in his best clothes, and seemed, with his indestructible blandness, to be perfectly happy.

"I was just strolling up to have a look at the ox," he added.

"Oh!" said Edwin. "Are they cooking it?"

"They should be, sir. But my fear is it may turn, in this weather."

"I'll come out with you," said Edwin, enlivened.

He locked the desk, and hurriedly straightened a few things, and then they went out together, by Wedgwood Street and the Cock Yard up to the market-place. No breeze moved, and the heat was tremendous. And there at the foot of the Town Hall tower, and in its scanty shadow, a dead ox, slung by its legs from an iron construction, was frizzling over a great primitive fire. The vast flanks of the animal, all rich yellows and browns, streamed with grease, some of which fell noisily on the almost invisible flames, while the rest was ingeniously caught in a system of runnels. The spectacle was obscene, nauseating to the eye, the nose, and the ear, and it powerfully recalled to Edwin the legends of the Spanish Inquisition. He speculated whether he would ever be able to touch beef again. Above the tortured and insulted corpse the air quivered in large waves. Mr. Doy, the leading butcher of Bursley, and now chief executioner, regarded with anxiety the operation which had been entrusted to him, and occasionally gave instructions to a myrmidon. Round about stood a few privileged persons, whom pride helped to bear the double heat; and farther off on the pavements, a thin scattered crowd. The sublime spectacle of an ox roasted whole had not sufficed to keep the townsmen in the town. Even the sages who had conceived and commanded this peculiar solemnity for celebrating the Jubilee of a Queen and Empress had not stayed in the borough to see it enacted, though some of them were to return in time to watch the devouring of the animal by the aged poor at a ceremonial feast in the evening.

"It's a grand sight!" said Big James, with simple enthusiasm. "A grand sight! Real old English! And I wish her well!" He meant the Queen and Empress. Then suddenly,

in a different tone, sniffing the air, "I doubt it's turned! I'll step across and ask Mr. Doy."

He stepped across, and came back with the news that the greater portion of the ox, despite every precaution, had in fact very annoyingly 'turned,' and that the remainder of the carcass was in serious danger.

"What'll the old people say?" he demanded sadly. "But it's a grand sight, turned or not!"

Edwin stared and stared, in a sort of sinister fascination. He thought that he might stare for ever. At length, after ages of ennui, he loosed himself from the spell with an effort and glanced at Big James.

"And what are you going to do with yourself to-day, James?"

Big James smiled. "I'm going to take my walks abroad, sir. It's seldom as I get about in the town nowadays."

"Well, I must be off!"

"I'd like you to give my respects to the old gentleman, sir."

Edwin nodded and departed, very slowly and idly, towards Trafalgar Road and Bleakridge. He pulled his straw hat over his forehead to avoid the sun, and then he pushed it backwards to his neck to avoid the sun. The odour of the shrivelling ox remained with him; it was in his nostrils for several days. His heart grew blacker with intense gloom; and the contentment of Big James at the prospect of just strolling about the damnable dead town for the rest of the day surpassed his comprehension. He abandoned himself to misery voluptuously. The afternoon and evening stretched before him, an arid and appalling Sahara. The Benbows, and their babes, and Auntie Hamps, were coming for dinner and tea, to cheer up grandfather. He pictured the repasts with savage gloating detestation—burnt ox, and more burnt ox, and the false odious brightness of a family determined to be mutually helpful and inspiring. Since his refusal to abet the project of a loan to Albert, Clara had been secretly hostile under her superficial sisterliness, and Auntie Hamps had often assured him, in a manner extraordinarily exasperating, that she was convinced he had acted conscientiously for the best. Strange thought, that after eight hours of these people and of his father, he would be still alive!

CHAPTER X

MRS. HAMPS AS A YOUNG MAN

I

ON the Saturday afternoon of the week following the Jubilee, Edwin and Mrs. Hamps were sunning themselves in the garden, when Janet's face and shoulders appeared suddenly at the other side of the wall. At the sight of Mrs. Hamps she seemed startled and intimidated, and she bowed somewhat more cermeoniously than usual.

"Good afternoon!"

Then Mrs. Hamps returned the bow with superb extravagance, like an Oriental monarch who is determined to outvie magnificently the gifts of another. Mrs. Hamps became conscious of the whole of her body and of every article of her summer apparel, and nothing of it all was allowed to escape from contributing to the completeness of the bow. She bridled. She tossed proudly as it were against the bit. And the rich ruins of her handsomeness adopted new and softer lines in the overpowering sickly blandishment of a smile. Thus she always greeted any merely formal acquaintance whom she considered to be above herself in status—provided, of course, that the acquaintance had done nothing to offend her.

"Good afternoon, Miss Orgreave!"

Reluctantly she permitted her features to relax from the full effort of the smile; but they might not abandon it entirely.

"I thought Maggie was there," said Janet.

"She was, a minute ago," Edwin answered. "She's just gone in to father. She'll be out directly. Do you want her?"

"I only wanted to tell her something," said Janet, and then paused.

She was obviously very excited. She had the little quick movements of a girl. In her cream-tinted frock she looked like a mere girl. And she was beautiful in her maturity ; a challenge to the world of males. As she stood there, rising from behind the wall, flushed, quivering, abandoned to an emotion and yet unconsciously dignified by that peculiar stateliness that never left her—as she stood there it seemed as if she really was offering a challenge.

“ I’ll fetch Mag, if you like,” said Edwin.

“ Well,” said Janet, lifting her chin proudly, “ it isn’t a secret. Alicia’s engaged.” And pride was in every detail of her bearing.

“ Well, I never ! ” Edwin exclaimed.

Mrs. Hamps’s features resumed the full smile.

“ Can you imagine it ? I can’t ! It seems only last week that she left school ! ”

And indeed it seemed only last week that Alicia was nothing but legs, gawkiness, blushes, and screwed-up shoulders. And now she was a destined bride. She had caught and enchanted a youth by her mysterious attractiveness. She had been caught and enchanted by the mysterious attractiveness of the male. She had known the dreadful anxiety that precedes the triumph, and the ecstasy of surrender. She had kissed as Janet had never kissed, and gazed as Janet had never gazed. She knew infinitely more than Janet. She had always been a child to Janet, but now Janet was the child. No wonder that Janet was excited.

“ Might one ask who is the fortunate young gentleman ? ” Mrs. Hamps dulcetly inquired.

“ It’s Harry Hesketh, from Oldcastle. . . . You’ve met him here,” she added, glancing at Edwin.

Mrs. Hamps nodded, satisfied, and the approving nod indicated that she was aware of all the excellences of the Hesketh family.

“ The tennis man ! ” Edwin murmured.

“ Yes, of course ! You aren’t surprised, are you ? ”

The fact was that Edwin had not given a thought to the possible relations between Alicia and any particular young man. But Janet’s thrilled air so patently assumed his interest that he felt obliged to make a certain pretence.

"I'm not what you'd call staggered," he said roguishly. "I'm keeping my nerve." And he gave her an intimate smile.

"Father in law and son in law have just been talking it over," said Janet archly, "in the breakfast room! Alicia thoughtfully went out for a walk. I'm dying for her to come back." Janet laughed from simple joyous expectation. "When Harry came out of the breakfast room he just put his arms round me and kissed me. Yes! That was how I was told about it. He's a dear! Don't you think so? I mean really! I felt I must come and tell some one."

Edwin had never seen her so moved. Her emotion was touching, it was beautiful. She need not have said that she had come because she must. The fact was in her rapt eyes. She was under a spell.

"Well, I must go!" she said, with a curious brusqueness. Perhaps she had a dim perception that she was behaving in a manner unusual with her. "You'll tell your sister."

Her departing bow to Mrs. Hamps had the formality of courts, and was equalled by Mrs. Hamps's bow. Just as Mrs. Hamps, having re-created her elaborate smile, was allowing it finally to expire, she had to bring it into existence once more, and very suddenly, for Janet returned to the wall.

"You won't forget tennis after tea," said Janet shortly.

Edwin said that he should not.

II

"Well, well!" Mrs. Hamps commented, and sat down in the wicker-chair of Darius.

"I wonder she doesn't get married herself," said Edwin idly, having nothing in particular to remark.

"You're a nice one to say such a thing!" Mrs. Hamps exclaimed.

"Why?"

"Well, you really are!" She raised the structure of her bonnet and curls, and shook it slowly at him. And her gaze had an extraordinary quality of fleshly naughtiness that half pleased and half annoyed him.

"Why?" he repeated.

"Well," she said again, "you aren't a ninny, and you

aren't a simpleton. At least I hope not. You must know as well as anybody the name of the young gentleman that *she's* waiting for."

In spite of himself, Edwin blushed: he blushed more and more. Then he scowled.

"What nonsense!" he muttered viciously. He was entirely sincere. The notion that Janet was waiting for him had never once crossed his mind. It seemed to him fantastic, one of those silly ideas that a woman such as Auntie Hamps would be likely to have, or more accurately would be likely to pretend to have. Still, it did just happen that on this occasion his auntie's expression was more convincing than usual. She seemed more human than usual, to have abandoned, at any rate partially, the baffling garment of effusive insincerity in which she hid her soul. The Eve in her seemed to show herself, and, looking forth from her eyes, to admit that the youthful dalliance of the sexes was alone interesting in this life of strict piety. The revelation was uncanny.

"You needn't talk like that," she retorted calmly, "unless you want to go down in my good opinion. You don't mean to tell me honestly that you don't know what's been the talk of the town for years and years!"

"It's ridiculous," said Edwin. "Why—what do you know of her—you don't know the Orgreaves at all!"

"I know *that*, anyway," said Auntie Hamps.

"Oh! Stuff!" He grew impatient.

And yet, in his extreme astonishment, he was flattered and delighted.

"Of course," said Auntie Hamps, "you're so difficult to talk to——"

"Difficult to talk to!—Me?"

"Otherwise your auntie might have given you a hint long ago. I believe you are a simpleton after all! I cannot understand what's come over the young men in these days. Letting a girl like that wait and wait!" She implied, with a faint scornful smile, that if she were a young man she would be capable of playing the devil with the maidenhood of the town. Edwin was rather hurt. And though he felt that he ought not to be ashamed, yet he was ashamed. He divined that she was asking him how he had the face to stand there before

her, at his age, with his youth unspilled. After all, she was an astounding woman. He remained silent.

"Why—look how splendid it would be!" she murmured. "The very thing! Everybody would be delighted!"

He still remained silent.

"But you can't keep on philandering for ever!" she said sharply. "She'll never see thirty again! . . . Why does she ask you to go and play at tennis? Can you tell me that? . . . perhaps I'm saying too much, but this I *will* say——"

She stopped.

Darius and Maggie appeared at the garden door. Maggie offered her hand to aid her father, but he repulsed it. Calmly she left him, and came up the garden, out of the deep shadow into the sunshine. She had learnt the news of the engagement, and had fully expressed her feelings about it before Darius arrived at his destination and Mrs. Hamps vacated the wicker-chair.

"I'll get some chairs," said Edwin gruffly. He could look nobody in the eyes. As he turned away he heard Mrs. Hamps say—

"Great news, father! Alicia Orgreave is engaged!"

The old man made no reply. His mere physical present deprived the betrothal of all its charm. The news fell utterly flat and lay unregarded and insignificant.

Edwin did not get the chairs. He sent the servant out with them.

CHAPTER XI

AN HOUR

I

JANET called out—

“ Play—no, I think perhaps you’ll do better if you stand a little farther back. Now—play ! ”

She brought down her lifted right arm, and smacked the ball into the net.

“ Double fault ! ” she cried, lamenting, when she had done this twice. “ Oh dear ! Now you go over to the other side of the court.”

Edwin would not have kept the rendezvous could he have found an excuse satisfactory to himself for staying away. He was a beginner at tennis, and a very awkward one, having little aptitude for games, and being now inelastic in the muscles. He possessed no flannels, though for weeks he had been meaning to get at least a pair of white pants. He was wearing Jimmie Orgreave’s india-rubber pumps, which admirably fitted him. Moreover, he was aware that he looked better in his jacket than in his shirt-sleeves. But these reasons against the rendezvous were naught. The only genuine reason was that he had felt timid about meeting Janet. Could he meet her without revealing by his mere guilty glance that his aunt had half convinced him that he had only to ask nicely in order to receive ? Could he meet her without giving her the impression that he was a conceited ass ? He had met her. She was waiting for him in the garden, and by dint of starting the conversation in loud tones from a distance, and fumbling a few moments with the tennis balls before approaching her, he had come through the encounter without too much foolishness.

And now he was glad that he had not been so silly as to stay away. She was alone ; Mrs. Orgreave was lying down, and

all the others were out. Alicia and her Harry were off together somewhere. She was alone in the garden, and she was beautiful, and the shaded garden was beautiful, and the fading afternoon. The soft short grass was delicate to his feet, and round the oval of the lawn were glimpses of flowers, and behind her clear-tinted frock was the yellow house laced over with green. A column of thick smoke rose from a manufactory close behind the house, but the trees mitigated it. He played perfunctorily, uninterested in the game, dreaming.

She was a wondrous girl! She was the perfect girl! Nobody had ever been able to find any fault with her. He liked her exceedingly. Had it been necessary, he would have sacrificed his just interests in the altercation with her father in order to avoid a coolness in which she might have been involved. She was immensely distinguished and superior. And she was over thirty and had never been engaged, despite the number and variety of her acquaintances, despite her challenging readiness to flirt, and her occasional coquetries. Ten years ago he had almost regarded her as a madonna on a throne, so high did she seem to be above him. His ideas had changed, but there could be no doubt that in an alliance between an Orgreave and a Clayhanger, it would be the Clayhanger who stood to gain the greater advantage. There she was! If she was not waiting for him, she was waiting—for some one! Why not for him as well as for another?

He said to himself—

“Why shouldn’t I be happy? That other thing is all over!”

It was, in fact, years since the name of Hilda had ever been mentioned between them. Why should he not be happy? There was nothing to prevent her from being happy. His father’s illness could not endure for ever. One day soon he would be free in theory as well as in practice. With no tie and no duty (Maggie was negligible) he would have both money and position. What might his life not be with a woman like Janet, brilliant, beautiful, elegant, and faithful? He pictured that life, and even the vision of it dazzled him. Janet his! Janet always there, presiding over a home which was his home, wearing hats that he had paid for, appealing constantly to his judgment, and meaning *him* when she said, ‘My husband.’ He saw her in the close and tender intimacy of marriage,

acquiescent, exquisite, yielding, calmly accustomed to him, modest, but with a different modesty! It was a vision surpassing visions. And there she was on the other side of the net!

With her he could be his finest self. He would not have to hide his finest self from ridicule, as often now, among his own family.

She was a fine woman! He watched the free movement of her waist, and the curvings and flyings of her short tennis skirt. And there was something strangely feminine about the neck of her blouse, now that he examined it.

"Your game!" she cried. "That's four double faults I've served. I can't play! I really don't think I can. There's something the matter with me! Or else it's the net that's too high. Those boys will keep screwing it up!"

She had a pouting, capricious air, and it delighted him. Never had he seen her so enchantingly girlish as, by a curious hazard, he saw her now. Why should he not be happy? Why should he not wake up out of his nightmare and begin to live? In a momentary flash he seemed to see his past in a true perspective, as it really was, as some well-balanced person not himself would have seen it. . . . Mere morbidity to say, as he had been saying privately for years, that marriage was not for him! Marriage emphatically was for him, if only because he had fine ideals of it. Most people who married were too stupid to get the value of their adventure. Celibacy was grotesque, cowardly, and pitiful—no matter how intellectual the celibate—and it was no use pretending the contrary.

A masculine gesture, an advance, a bracing of the male in him . . . probably nothing else was needed.

"Well," he said boldly, "if you don't want to play, let's sit down and rest." And then he gave a nervous little laugh.

II

They sat down on the bench that was shaded by the old elderberry tree. Visually, the situation had all the characteristics of an idyllic courtship.

"I suppose it's Alicia's engagement," she said, smiling reflectively, "that's put me off my game. They do upset

you, those things do, and you don't know why. . . . It isn't as if Alicia was the first—I mean of us girls. There was Marian ; but then, of course, that was so long ago, and I was only a chit."

" Yes," he murmured vaguely ; and though she seemed to be waiting for him to say more, he merely repeated, " Yes."

Such was his sole contribution to this topic, so suitable to the situation, so promising, so easy of treatment. They were so friendly that he was under no social obligation to talk for the sake of talking.

That was it : they were too friendly. She sat within a foot of him, reclining against the sloping back of the bench, and idly dangling one white-shod foot ; her long hands lay on her knees. She was there in all her perfection. But by some sinister magic, as she had approached him and their paths had met at the bench, his vision had faded. Now, she was no longer a woman and he a man. Now, the curvings of her drapery from the elegant waistband were no longer a provocation. She was immediately beneath his eye, and he recognized her again for what she was—Janet ! Precisely Janet—no less and no more ! But her beauty, her charm, her faculty for affection—surely . . . No ! His instinct was deaf to all ' but.' His instinct did not argue ; it cooled. Fancy had created a vision in an instant out of an idea, and in an instant the vision had died. He remembered Hilda with painful intensity. He remembered the feel of her frock under his hand in the cubicle, and the odour of her flesh that was like fruit. His cursed constancy ! . . . Could he not get Hilda out of his bones ? Did she sleep in his bones like a malady that awakes whenever it is disrespectfully treated ?

He grew melancholy. Accustomed to savour the sadness of existence, he soon accepted the new mood without resentment. He resigned himself to the destruction of his dream. He was like a captive whose cell has been opened in mistake, and who is too gentle to rave when he sees it shut again. Only in secret he poured an indifferent, careless scorn upon Auntie Hamps.

They played a whole interminable set, and then Edwin went home, possibly marvelling at the variety of experience that a single hour may contain.

CHAPTER XII

REVENGE

I

EDWIN re-entered his home with a feeling of dismayed resignation. There was then no escape, and never could be any escape from the existence to which he was accustomed ; even after his father's death, his existence would still be essentially the same—incomplete and sterile. He accepted the destiny, but he was daunted by it.

He quietly shut the front door, which had been ajar, and as he did so he heard voices in the drawing-room.

"I tell ye I'm going to grow mushrooms," Darius was saying. "Can't I grow mushrooms in my own cellar?" Then a snort.

"I don't think it'll be a good thing," was Maggie's calm reply.

"Ye've said that afore. Why won't it be a good thing? And what's it got to do with you?" The voice of Darius, ordinarily weak and languid, was rising and becoming strong.

"Well, you'd be falling up and down the cellar steps. You know how dark they are. Supposing you hurt yourself?"

"Ye'd only be too glad if I killed mysen!" said Darius, with a touch of his ancient grimness.

There was a pause.

"And it seems they want a lot of attention, mushrooms do," Maggie went on with unperturbed placidity. "You'd never be able to do it."

"Jane could help me," said Darius, in the tone of one who is rather pleased with an ingenious suggestion.

"Oh no, she couldn't!" Maggie exclaimed, with a peculiar humorous dryness which she employed only on the rarest occasions. Jane was the desired Bathsheba.

"And I say she could!" the old man shouted with surprising vigour. "Her does nothing! What does Mrs. Nixon do? What do you do? Three great strapping women in the house and doing nought! I say she shall!" The voice dropped and snarled. "Who's master here? Is it me, or is it the cat? D'ye think as I can't turn ye all out of it neck and crop, if I've a mind? You and Edwin, and the lot of ye! And to-night too! Give me some money now, and quicker than that! I've got nought but sovereigns and notes. I'll go down and get the spawn myself—ay! and order the earth too! I'll make it my business to show my childer—— But I mun have some change for my car fares." He breathed heavily.

"I'm sure Edwin won't like it," Maggie murmured.

"Edwin! Hast told Edwin?" Darius also murmured, but it was a murmur of rage.

"No I haven't. Edwin's got quite enough on his hands as it is, without any other worries."

There was the noise of a sudden movement, and of a chair falling.

"B—— you all!" Darius burst out with a fury whose restraint showed that he had unsuspected reserves of strength. And then he began to swear. Edwin, like many timid men, often used forbidden words with much ferocity in private. Once he had had a long philosophic argument with Tom Orgreave on the subject of profanity. They had discussed all aspects of it, from its religious origin to its psychological results, and Edwin's theory had been that it was only improper by a purely superstitious convention, and that no man of sense could possibly be offended, in himself, by the mere sound of words that had been deprived of meaning. He might be offended on behalf of an unreasoning fellow-listener, such as a woman, but not personally. Edwin now discovered that his theory did not hold. He was offended. He was almost horrified. He had never in his life till that moment heard Darius swear. He heard him now. He considered himself to be a fairly first-class authority on swearing; he thought that he was familiar with all the sacred words and with all the combinations of them. He was mistaken. His father's profanity was a brilliant and appalling revelation. It com-

prised words which were strange to him, and strange perversions that renewed the vigour of decrepit words. For Edwin, it was a whole series of fresh formulæ, brutal and shameless beyond his experience, full of images and similes of the most startling candour, and drawing its inspiration always from the sickening bases of life. Darius had remembered with ease the vocabulary to which he was hourly accustomed when he began life as a man of seven. For more than fifty years he had carried within himself these vestiges of a barbarism which his children had never even conceived, and now he threw them out in all their crud ty at his daughter. And when she did not blench, he began to accuse her as men were used to accuse their daughters in the bright days of the Sailor King. He invented enormities which she had committed, and there would have been no obscene infamy of which Maggie was not guilty, if Edwin—more by instinct than by volition—had not pushed open the door and entered the drawing-room.

II

He was angry, and the sight of the flushed meekness of his sister, as she leaned quietly with her back against an easy chair, made him angrier.

“Enough of this!” he said gruffly and peremptorily.

Darius, with scarcely a break, continued.

“I say enough of this!” Edwin cried, with increased harshness.

The old man paused, half intimidated. With his pimpled face and glaring eyes, his gleaming gold teeth, his frowziness of a difficult invalid, his grimaces and gestures which were the result of a lifetime devoted to gain, he made a loathsome object. Edwin hated him, and there was a bitter contempt in his hatred.

“I’m going to have that spawn, and I’m going to have some change! Give me some money!” Darius positively hissed.

Edwin grew nearly capable of homicide. All the wrongs that he had suffered leaped up and yelled.

“You’ll have no money!” he said, with brutal roughness. “And you’ll grow no mushrooms! And let that be under-

stood once for all. You've got to behave in this house."

Darius flickered up.

"Do you hear?" Edwin stamped on the conflagration.

It was extinguished. Darius, cowed, slowly and clumsily directed himself towards the door. Once Edwin had looked forward to a moment when he might have his father at his mercy, when he might revenge himself for the insults and the bullying that had been his. Once he had clenched his fist and his teeth, and had said, "When you're old, and I've got you, and you can't help yourself . . . !" That moment had come, and it had even enabled and forced him to refuse money to his father—refuse money to his father! . . . As he looked at the poor figure fumbling towards the door, he knew the humiliating paltriness of revenge. As his anger fell, his shame grew.

Maggie lifted her eyebrows when Darius banged the door.

"He can't help it," she said.

"Of course he can't help it," said Edwin, defending himself, less to Maggie than to himself. "But there must be a limit. He's got to be kept in order, you know, even if he is an invalid." His heart was perceptibly beating.

"Yes, of course."

"And evidently there's only one way of doing it. How long's he been on this mushroom tack?"

"Oh, not long."

"Well, you ought to have told me," said Edwin, with the air of a master of the house who is displeased. Maggie accepted the reproof.

"He'd break his neck in the cellar before he knew where he was," Edwin resumed.

"Yes, he would," said Maggie, and left the room.

Upon her placid features there was not the slightest trace of the onslaught of profanity. The faint flush had paled away.

III

The next morning, Sunday, Edwin came downstairs late, to the sound of singing. In his soft carpet-slippers he stopped at the foot of the stairs and tapped the weather-glass, after the manner of his father; and listened. It was a duet for female

voices that was being sung, composed by Balfe to the words of the good Longfellow's "Excelsior." A pretty thing, charming in its thin sentimentality ; one of the few pieces that Darius in former days really understood and liked. Maggie and Clara had not sung it for years. For years they had not sung it at all.

Edwin went to the doorway of the drawing-room and stood there. Clara, in Sunday bonnet, was seated at the ancient piano ; it had always been she who had played the accompaniments. Maggie, nursing one of the babies, sat on another chair, and leaned towards the page in order to make out the words. She had half-forgotten the words, and Clara was no longer at ease in the piano part, and their voices were shaky and unruly, and the piano itself was exceedingly bad. A very indifferent performance of indifferent music ! And yet it touched Edwin. He could not deny that by its beauty and by the sentiment of old times it touched him. He moved a little forward in the doorway. Clara glanced at him, and winked. Now he could see his father. Darius was standing at some distance behind his daughters and his grandchild, and staring at them. And the tears rained down from his red eyes, and then his emotion overcame him and he blubbered, just as the duet finished.

"Now, father," Clara protested cheerfully, "this won't do. You know you asked for it. Give me the infant, Maggie."

Edwin walked away.

CHAPTER XIII

THE JOURNEY UPSTAIRS

I

LATE on another Saturday afternoon in the following March, when Darius had been ill nearly two years, he and Edwin and Albert were sitting round the remains of high tea together in the dining-room. Clara had not been able to accompany her husband on what was now the customary Saturday visit, owing to the illness of her fourth child. Mrs. Hamps was fighting chronic rheumatism at home. And Maggie had left the table to cosset Mrs. Nixon, who of late received more help than she gave.

Darius sat in dull silence. The younger men were talking about the Bursley Society for the Prosecution of Felons, of which Albert had just been made a member. Whatever it might have been in the past, the Society for the Prosecution of Felons was now a dining-club and little else. Its annual dinner, admitted to be the chief oratorical event of the year, was regarded as strictly exclusive, because no member, except the president, had the right to bring a guest to it. Only 'Felons,' as they humorously named themselves, and the reporters of the "Signal" might listen to the eloquence of Felons. Albert Benbow, who for years had been hearing about the brilliant funniness of the American Consul at these dinners, was so flattered by his Felonry that he would have been ready to put the letters S.P.F. after his name.

"Oh, you'll have to join!" said he to Edwin, kindly urgent, like a man who, recently married, goes about telling all bachelors that they positively must marry at once. "You ought to get it fixed up before the next feed."

Edwin shook his head. Though he, too, dreamed of the Felons' Dinner as a repast really worth eating, though he wanted to be a Felon, and considered that he ought to be a

Felon, and wondered why he was not already a Felon, he repeatedly assured Albert that Felonry was not for him.

"You're a Felon, aren't you, dad?" Albert shouted at Darius.

"Oh yes, father's a Felon," said Edwin. "Has been ever since I can remember."

"Did ye ever speak there?" asked Albert, with an air of good-humoured condescension.

Darius's elbow slipped violently off the table-cloth, and a knife fell to the floor and a plate after it. Darius went pale.

"All right! All right! Don't be alarmed, dad!" Albert reassured him, picking up the things. "I was asking ye, did ye ever speak there—make a speech?"

"Yes," said Darius heavily.

"Did you now!" Albert murmured, staring at Darius. And it was exactly as if he had said, "Well, it's extraordinary that a foolish physical and mental wreck such as you are now, should ever have had wit and courage enough to rise and address the glorious Felons!"

Darius glanced up at the gas, with a gesture that was among Edwin's earliest recollections, and then he fixed his eyes dully on the fire, with head bent and muscles lax.

"Have a cigarette—that'll cheer ye up," said Albert.

Darius made a negative sign.

"He's very tired, seemingly," Albert remarked to Edwin, as if Darius had not been present.

"Yes," Edwin muttered, examining his father. Darius appeared ten years older than his age. His thin hair was white, though the straggling beard that had been allowed to grow was only grey. His face was sunken and pale, but even more striking was the extreme pallor of the hands with their long clean finger-nails, those hands that had been red and rough, tools of all work. His clothes hung somewhat loosely on him, and a shawl round his shoulders was awry. The comatose melancholy in his eyes was acutely painful to see—so much so that Edwin could not bear to look long at them. "Father," Edwin asked him suddenly, "wouldn't you like to go to bed?"

And to his surprise Darius said, "Yes."

"Well, come on then."

Darius did not move.

"Come on," Edwin urged. "I'm sure you're overtired, and you'll be better in bed."

He took his father by the arm, but there was no responsive movement. Often Edwin noticed this capricious, obstinate attitude; his father would express a wish to do a certain thing, and then would make no effort to do it. "Come!" said Edwin more firmly, pulling at the lifeless arm. Albert sprang up, and said that he would assist. One on either side, they got Darius to his feet, and slowly walked him out of the room. He was very exasperating. His weight and his inertia were terrible. The spectacle suggested that either Darius was pretending to be a carcass, or Edwin and Albert were pretending that a carcass was alive. On the stairs there was not room for the three abreast. One had to push, another to pull: Darius seemed wilfully to fall backwards if pressure were released. Edwin restrained his exasperation; but though he said nothing, his sharp half-vicious pull on that arm seemed to say, "Confound you! Come up—will you!" The last two steps of the stair had a peculiar effect on Darius. He appeared to shy at them, and then finally to jib. It was no longer a reasonable creature that they were getting upstairs, but an incalculable and mysterious beast. They lifted him on to the landing, and he stood on the landing as if in his sleep. Both Edwin and Albert were breathless. This was the man who since the beginning of his illness had often walked to Hillport and back! It was incredible that he had ever walked to Hillport and back. He passed more easily along the landing. And then he was in his bedroom.

"Father going to bed?" Maggie called out from below.

"Yes," said Albert. "We've just been getting him upstairs."

"Oh! That's right," Maggie said cheerfully. "I thought he was looking very tired to-night."

"He gave us a doing," said the breathless Albert in a low voice at the door of the bedroom, smiling, and glancing at his cigarette to see if it was still alight.

"He does it on purpose, you know," Edwin whispered casually. "I'll just get him to bed, and then I'll be down."

Albert went, with a 'good night' to Darius that received no answer.

II

In the bedroom, Darius had sunk on to the cushioned ottoman. Edwin shut the door.

"Now then!" said Edwin, encouragingly, yet commandingly. "I can tell you one thing—you aren't losing weight." He had recovered from his annoyance, but he was not disposed to submit to any trifling. For many months now he had helped Darius to dress, when he came up from the shop for breakfast, and to undress in the evening. It was not that his father lacked the strength, but he would somehow lose himself in the maze of his garments, and apparently he could never remember the proper order of doffing or donning them. Sometimes he would ask, "Am I dressing or undressing?" And he would be capable of so involving himself in a shirt, if Edwin were not there to direct, that much patience was needed for his extrication. His misapprehensions and mistakes frequently reached the grotesque. As habit threw them more and more intimately together, the trusting dependence of Darius on Edwin increased. At morning and evening the expression of that intensely mournful visage seemed to be saying as its gaze met Edwin's, "Here is the one clear-sighted, powerful being who can guide me through this complex and frightful problem of my clothes." A suit, for Darius, had become as intricate as a quadratic equation. And, in Edwin, compassion and irritation fought an interminable guerilla. Now one obtained the advantage, now the other. His nerves demanded relief from the friction, but he could offer them no holiday, not one single day's holiday. Twice every day he had to manœuvre and persuade that ponderous, irrational body in his father's bedroom. Maggie helped the body to feed itself at table. But Maggie apparently had no nerves.

"I shall never go down them stairs again," said Darius, as if in fatigued disgust, on the ottoman.

"Oh, nonsense!" Edwin exclaimed.

Darius shook his head solemnly, and looked at vacancy.

"Well we'll talk about that to-morrow," said Edwin, and

with the skill of regular practice drew out the ends of the bow of his father's neck-tie. He had gradually evolved a complete code of rules covering the entire process of the toilette, and he insisted on their observance. Every article had its order in the ceremony and its place in the room. Never had the room been so tidy, nor the rites so expeditious, as in the final months of Darius's malady.

III

The cumbrous body lay in bed. The bed was in an architecturally contrived recess, sheltered from both the large window and the door. Over its head was the gas-bracket and the bell-knob. At one side was a night-table, and at the other a chair. In front of the night-table were Darius's slippers. On the chair were certain clothes. From a hook near the night-table, and almost over the slippers, hung his dressing-gown. Seen from the bed, the dressing-table, at the window, appeared to be a long way off, and the wardrobe was a long way off in another direction. The gas was turned low. It threw a pale illumination on the bed, and gleamed on a curve of mahogany here and there in the distances.

Edwin looked at his father, to be sure that all was in order, that nothing had been forgotten. The body seemed monstrous and shapeless beneath the thickly piled clothes; and from the edge of the eider-down, making a valley in the pillow, the bearded face projected, in a manner grotesque and ridiculous. A clock struck seven in another part of the house.

"What time's that?" Darius murmured.

"Seven," said Edwin, standing close to him.

Darius raised himself slowly and clumsily on one elbow.

"Here! But look here!" Edwin protested. "I've just fixed you up . . ."

The old man ignored him, and one of those unnaturally white hands stretched forth to the night-table, which was on the side of the bed opposite to Edwin. Darius's gold watch and chain lay on the night-table.

"I've wound it up! I've wound it up!" said Edwin, a little crossly. "What are you worrying at?"

But Darius, silent, continued to manœuvre his flannelled arm so as to possess the watch. At length he seized the

chain, and, shifting his weight to the other elbow, held out the watch and chain to Edwin, with a most piteous expression. Edwin could see in the twilight that his father was ready to weep.

"I want ye——" the old man began, and then burst into violent sobs; and the watch dangled dangerously.

"Come now!" Edwin tried to soothe him, forcing himself to be kindly. "What is it? I tell you I've wound it up all right. And it's correct time to a tick." He consulted his own silver watch.

With a tremendous effort, Darius mastered his sobs, and began once more, "I want ye——"

He tried several times, but his emotion overcame him each time before he could force the message out. It was always too quick for him. Silent, he could control it, but he could not simultaneously control it and speak.

"Never mind," said Edwin. "We'll see about that tomorrow." And he wondered what bizarre project affecting the watch had entered his father's mind. Perhaps he wanted it set a quarter of an hour fast.

Darius dropped the watch on the eider-down, and sighed in despair, and fell back on the pillow and shut his eyes. Edwin restored the watch to the night-table.

Later, he crept into the dim room. Darius was snoring under the twilight of the gas. Like an unhappy child, he had found refuge in sleep from the enormous, infantile problems of his existence. And it was so pathetic, so distressing, that Edwin, as he gazed at that beard and those gold teeth, could have sobbed too.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WATCH

I

WHEN Edwin the next morning, rather earlier than usual on Sundays, came forth from his bedroom to go into the bathroom, he was startled by a voice from his father's bedroom calling him. It was Maggie's. She had heard him open his door, and she joined him on the landing.

"I was waiting for you to be getting up," she said in a quiet tone. "I don't think father's so well, and I was wondering whether I hadn't better send Jane down for the doctor. It's not certain he'll call to-day if he isn't specially fetched."

"Why?" said Edwin. "What's up?"

"Oh, nothing," Maggie answered. "Nothing particular, but—you didn't hear him ringing in the night?"

"Ringing? No! What time?"

"About one o'clock. Jane heard the bell, and she woke me. So I got up to him. He said he couldn't do with being alone."

"What did you do?"

"I made him something hot and stayed with him."

"What? All night?"

"Yes," said Maggie.

"But why didn't you call me?"

"What was the good?"

"You ought to have called me," he said with curt displeasure, not really against Maggie, but against himself for having heard naught of all these happenings. Maggie had no appearance of having passed the night by her father's bedside.

"Oh," she said lightly "I dozed a bit now and then.

And as soon as the girl was up I got her to come and sit with him while I spruced myself."

"I'll have a look at him," said Edwin, in another tone.

"Yes, I wish you would." Now, as often, he was struck by Maggie's singular deference to him, her submission to his judgment. In the past her attitude had been different; she had exercised the moral rights of an elder sister; but latterly she had mysteriously transformed herself into a younger sister.

He went towards his father, drawing his dressing-gown more closely round him. The chamber had an aspect of freshness and tidiness that made it almost gay—until he looked at the object in the smoothed and rectified bed. He nodded to his father, who merely gazed at him. There was no definite, definable change in the old man's face, but his bearing, even as he lay, was appreciably more melancholy and impotent. The mere sight of a man so broken and so sad was humiliating to the humanity which Edwin shared with him.

"Well, father," he nodded familiarly. "Don't feel like getting up, eh?" And, remembering that he was the head of the house, the source of authority and of strength, he tried to be cheerful, casual, and invigorating, and was disgusted by the futile inefficiency of the attempt. He had not, like Auntie Hamps, devoted a lifetime to the study of the trick.

Darius feebly moved his hopeless head to signify a negative.

And Edwin thought, with a lancinating pain, of what the old man had mumbled on the previous evening: "I shall never go down them stairs again." Perhaps the old man never would go down those stairs again! He had paid no serious attention to the remark at the moment, but now it presented itself to him as a solemn and prophetic utterance, of such as are remembered with awe for years and continue to jut up clear in the mind when all minor souvenirs of the time have crumbled away. And he would have given much of his pride to be able to go back and help the old man upstairs once more, and do it with a more loving patience.

"I've sent Jane," said Maggie, returning to the bedroom. "You'd better go and finish dressing."

On coming out of the bathroom he discovered Albert on the landing, waiting.

"The missis would have me come up and see how he was," said Albert. "So I've run in between school and chapel. When I told her what a doing he gave us, getting him upstairs, she was quite in a way, and she would have me come up. The kid's better." He was exceedingly and quite genuinely fraternal, not having his wife's faculty for nourishing a feud.

II

The spectacular developments were rapid. In the afternoon Auntie Hamps, Clara, Maggie, and Edwin were grouped around the bed of Darius. A fire burned in the grate; flowers were on the dressing-table. An extra table had been placed at the foot of the bed. The room was a sick-room.

Dr. Heve had called, and had said that the patient's desire not to be left alone was a symptom of gravity. He suggested a nurse, and when Maggie, startled, said that perhaps they could manage without a nurse, he inquired how. And as he talked he seemed to be more persuaded that a nurse was necessary, if only for night duty, and in the end he went himself to the new Telephone Exchange and ordered a nurse from the Pirehill Infirmary Nursing Home. And the dramatic thing was that within two hours and a half the nurse had arrived. And in ten minutes after that it had been arranged that she should have Maggie's bedroom and that she should take night duty, and in order that she might be fresh for the night she had gone straight off to bed.

Then Clara had arrived, in spite of the illness of her baby, and Auntie Hamps had forced herself up Trafalgar Road, in spite of her rheumatism. And a lengthy confabulation between the women had occurred in the dining-room, not about the invalid, but about what 'she' had said, and about the etiquette of treating 'her,' and about what 'she' looked like and shaped like; 'her' and 'she' being the professional nurse. With a professional nurse in it, each woman sincerely felt that the house was no longer itself, that it had become the house of the enemy.

Darius lay supine before them, physically and spiritually abased, accepting, like a victim who is too weak even to be ashamed, the cooings and strokings and prayers and optimistic

mendacities of Auntie Hamps, and the tearful tendernesses of Clara.

"I've made my will," he whimpered.

"Yes, yes," said Auntie Hamps. "Of course you have!"

"Did I tell you I'd made my will?" he feebly insisted.

"Yes, father," said Clara. "Don't worry about your will."

"I've left th' business to Edwin, and all th' rest's divided between you two wenches." He was weeping gently.

"Don't worry about that, father," Clara repeated. "Why are you thinking so much about your will?" She tried to speak in a tone that was easy and matter-of-fact. But she could not. This was the first authentic information that any of them had had as to the dispositions of the will, and it was exciting.

Then Darius began to try to sit up, and there were protests against such an act. Though he sat up to take his food, the tone of these apprehensive remonstrances implied that to sit up at any other time was to endanger his life. Darius, however, with a weak scowl, continued to lift himself, whereupon Maggie aided him, and Auntie Hamps like lightning put a shawl round his shoulders. He sighed, and stretched out his hand to the night-table for his gold watch and chain, which he dangled towards Edwin.

"I want ye——" He stopped, controlling the muscles of his face.

"He wants you to wind it up," said Clara, struck by her own insight.

"No, he doesn't," said Edwin. "He knows it's wound up."

"I want ye——" Darius recommenced. But he was defeated again by his insidious foe. He wept loudly and without restraint for a few moments, and then suddenly ceased, and endeavoured to speak, and wept anew, agitating the watch in the direction of Edwin.

"Take it, Edwin," said Mrs. Hamps. "Perhaps he wants it put away," she added, as Edwin obeyed.

Darius shook his head furiously. "I want him——" Sobs choked him.

"I know what he wants," said Auntie Hamps. "He wants to give dear Edwin the watch, because Edwin's been so kind to him, helping him to dress every day, and looking after him just like a professional nurse—don't you, dear?"

Edwin secretly cursed her in the most horrible fashion. But she was right.

"Ye-hes," Darius confirmed her, on a sob.

"He wants to show his gratitude," said Auntie Hamps.

"Ye-hes," Darius repeated, and wiped his eyes.

Edwin stood foolishly holding the watch with its massive Albert chain. He was very genuinely astonished, and he was profoundly moved. His father's emotion concerning him must have been gathering force for months and months, increasing a little and a little every day in those daily, intimate contacts, until at length gratitude had become, as it were, a spirit that possessed him, a monstrous demon whose wild eagerness to escape defeated itself. And Edwin had never guessed, for Darius had mastered the spirit till the moment when the spirit mastered him. It was out now, and Darius, delivered, breathed more freely. Edwin was proud, but his humiliation was greater than his pride. He suffered humiliation for his father. He would have preferred that Darius should never have felt gratitude, or, at any rate, that he should never have shown it. He would have preferred that Darius should have accepted his help nonchalantly, grimly, thanklessly, as a right. And if, through disease, the old man could not cease to be a tyrant with dignity, could not become human without this appalling ceremonial abasement—better that he should have exercised harshness and oppression to the very end! There was probably no phenomenon of human nature that offended Edwin's instincts more than an open conversation.

Maggie turned nervously away and busied herself with the grate.

"You must put it on," said Auntie Hamps sweetly. "Mustn't he, father?"

Darius nodded.

The outrage was complete. Edwin removed his own watch and dropped it into the pocket of his trousers, substituting for it the gold one.

"There, father!" exclaimed Auntie Hamps proudly, surveying the curve of the Albert on her nephew's waist-coat.

"Aye!" Darius murmured, and sank back on the pillow with a sigh of relief.

"Thanks, father," Edwin muttered, reddening. "But there was no occasion."

"Now you see what it is to be a good son!" Auntie Hamps observed.

Darius murmured indistinctly.

"What is it?" she asked, bending down.

"I must have his," said Darius. "I must have a watch here."

"He wants your old one in exchange," Clara explained eagerly.

Edwin smiled, discovering a certain alleviation in this shrewd demand of his father's, and he drew out the silver Geneva.

III

Shortly afterwards the nurse surprised them all by coming into the room. She carried a writing-case. Edwin introduced her to Auntie Hamps and Clara. Clara blushed and became mute. Auntie Hamps adopted a tone of excessive deference, of which the refrain was "Nurse will know best." Nurse seemed disinclined to be professional. Explaining that as she was not able to sleep she thought she might as well get up, she took a seat near the fire and addressed herself to Maggie. She was a tall and radiant woman of about thirty. Her aristocratic southern accent proved that she did not belong to the Five Towns, and to Maggie, in excuse for certain questions as to the district, she said that she had only been at Pirchill a few weeks. Her demeanour was extraordinarily cheerful. Auntie Hamps remarked aside to Clara what a good thing it was that Nurse was so cheerful; but in reality she considered such cheerfulness exaggerated in a sick-room, and not quite nice. The nurse asked about the posts, and said she had a letter to write and would write it there if she could have pen and ink. Auntie Hamps, telling her eagerly about the posts, thought that these professional nurses cer-

tainly did make themselves at home in a house. The nurse's accent intimidated all of them.

"Well, nurse, I suppose we mustn't tire our patient," said Auntie Hamps at last, after Edwin had brought ink and paper.

Edwin, conscious of the glory of a gold watch and chain, and conscious also of freedom from future personal service on his father, preceded Auntie Hamps and Clara to the landing, and Nurse herself sped them from the room, in her quality of mistress of the room. And when she and Maggie and Darius were alone together she went to the bedside and spoke softly to her patient. She was so neat and bright and white and striped, and so perfect in every detail, that she might have been a model taken straight from a shop-window. Her figure illuminated the dusk. An incredible luxury for the little boy from the Bastille! But she was one of the many wonderful things he had earned.

CHAPTER XV

THE BANQUET

I

IT was with a conscience uneasy that Edwin shut the front door one night a month later, and issued out into Trafalgar Road. Since the arrival of Nurse Shaw, Darius had not risen from his bed, and the household had come to accept him as bed-ridden and the nurse as a permanency. The sick-room was the centre of the house, and Maggie and Edwin and the servants lived, as it were, in a camp round about it, their days uncomfortably passing in suspense, in expectation of developments which tarried. "How is he this morning?" "Much the same." "How is he this evening?" "Much the same." These phrases had grown familiar and tedious. But for three days Darius had been noticeably worse, and the demeanour of Nurse Shaw had altered, and she had taken less sleep and less exercise. Osmond Orgreave had even called in person to inquire after the invalid, doubtless moved by Janet to accomplish this formality, for he could not have been without news. Janet was constantly in the house, helping Maggie; and Alicia also sometimes. Since her engagement, Alicia had been striving to prove that she appreciated the gravity of existence.

Still, despite the change in the patient's condition, everybody had insisted that Edwin should go to the annual dinner of the Society for the Prosecution of Felons, to which he had been duly elected with flattering dispatch. Why should he not go? Why should he not enjoy himself? What could he do if he stayed at home? Would not the change be good for him? At most the absence would be for a few hours, and if he could absent himself during ten hours for business, surely for healthful distraction he might absent himself during five hours! Maggie grew elder-sisterly at the last moment of

decision, and told him he must go, and that if he didn't she should be angry. When he asked her 'What about *her* health? What about *her* needing a change?' she said curtly that that had nothing to do with it.

He went. The persuaders were helped by his own desire. And in spite of his conscience, when he was fairly in the street he drew a sigh of relief, and deliberately turned his heart towards gaiety. It seemed inexpressibly pathetic that his father was lying behind those just-lighted blinds above, and would never again breathe the open air, never again glide along those pavements with his arms fixed and slightly outwards. But Edwin was determined to listen to reason and not to be morbid.

The streets were lively with the red and the blue colours of politics. The Liberal member for the Parliamentary borough of Hanbridge, which included Bursley, had died very suddenly, and the seat was being disputed by the previously defeated Conservative candidate and a new Labour candidate officially adopted by the Liberal party. The Tories had sworn not to be beaten again in the defence of the integrity of the Empire. And though they had the difficult and delicate task of persuading a large industrial constituency that an industrial representative would not further industrial interests, and that they alone were actuated by unselfish love for the people, yet they had made enormous progress in a very brief period, and publicans were jubilant and bars sloppy.

The aspect of the affair that did not quite please the Society for the Prosecution of Felons was that the polling had been fixed for the day after its annual dinner instead of the day before. Powerful efforts had been made 'in the proper quarter' to get the date conveniently arranged, but without success; after all, the seat of authority was Hanbridge and not Bursley. Hanbridge, sadly failing to appreciate the importance of Bursley's Felonry, had suggested that the feast might be moved a couple of days. The Felonry refused. If its dinner clashed with the supreme night of the campaign, so much the worse for the campaign! Moreover, the excitement of the campaign would at any rate give zest to the dinner.

Ere he reached Duck Bank, the vivacity of the town,

loosed after the day's labour to an evening's orgy of oratory and horse-play and beer, had communicated itself to Edwin. He was most distinctly aware of pleasure in the sight of the Tory candidate driving past, at a pace to overtake steam-cars, in a coach-and-four, with amateur postilions and an orchestra of horns. The spectacle, and the speed of it, somehow thrilled him, and for an instant made him want to vote Tory. A procession of illuminated carts, bearing white potters apparently engaged in the handicraft which the Labour candidate had practised in humbler days, also pleased him, but pleased him less. As he passed up Duck Bank the Labour candidate himself was raising loud enthusiastic cheers from a railway lorry in Duck Square, and Edwin's spirits went even higher, and he elbowed through the laughing, joking throng with fraternal good-humour, feeling that an election was in itself a grand thing, apart from its result, and apart from the profit which it brought to steam-printers.

In the porch of the Town Hall, a man turned from an eagerly-smiling group of hungry Felons and straightening his face, asked with quiet concern, "How's your father?" Edwin shook his head. "Pretty bad," he answered. "Is he?" murmured the other sadly. And Edwin suddenly saw his father again behind the blind, irrevocably prone.

II

But by the time the speeches were in progress he was uplifted high once more into the joy of life. He had been welcomed by acquaintances and by strangers with a deferential warmth that positively startled him. He realized, as never before, that the town esteemed him as a successful man. His place was not many removes from the chair. Osmond Orgreave was on his right, and Albert Benbow on his left. He had introduced an impressed Albert to his friend Mr. Orgreave, recently made a Justice of the Peace.

And down the long littered tables stretched the authority and the wealth of the town—aldermen, councillors, members of the school board, guardians of the poor, magistrates, solid tradesmen, and solid manufacturers, together with higher officials of the borough and some members of the learned professions. Here was the oligarchy which, behind the

appearances of democratic government, effectively managed, directed, and controlled the town. Here was the handful of people who settled between them whether rates should go up or down, and to whom it did not seriously matter whether rates went up or down, provided that the interests of the common people were not too sharply set in antagonism to their own interests. Here were the privileged, who did what they liked on the condition of not offending each other. Here the populace was honestly and cynically and openly regarded as a restless child, to be humoured and to be flattered, but also to be ruled firmly, to be kept in its place, to be ignored when advisable, and to be made to pay.

For the feast, the court-room had been transformed into a banqueting hall, and the magistrates' bench, where habitual criminals were created and families ruined and order maintained, was hidden in flowers. Osmond Orgreave was dryly facetious about that bench. He exchanged comments with other magistrates, and they all agreed, with the same dry facetiousness, that most of the law was futile and some of it mischievous; and they all said, 'But what can you do?' and by their tone indicated that you could do nothing. According to Osmond Orgreave's wit, the only real use of a magistrate was to sign the necessary papers for persons who had lost pawn-tickets. It appeared that such persons in distress came to Mr. Orgreave every day for the august signature. "I had an old woman come to me this morning at my office," he said. "I asked her how it was they were always losing their pawn-tickets. I told her I never lost mine." Osmond Orgreave was encircled with laughter. Edwin laughed heartily. It was a good joke. And even mediocre jokes would convulse the room.

Jos Curtenty, the renowned card, a jolly old gentleman of sixty, was in the chair, and therefore jollity was assured in advance. Rising to inaugurate the oratorical section of the night, he took an enormous red flower from a bouquet behind him, and sticking it with a studiously absent air in his button-hole, said blandly, "Gentlemen, no politics, please!" The uproarious effect was one of his very best. He knew his audience. He could have taught Edwin a thing or two. For Edwin in his simplicity was astonished to find the audience

almost all of one colour, frankly and joyously and optimistically Tory. There were not ten Liberals in the place, and there was not one who was vocal. The cream of the town, of its brains, its success, its respectability, was assembled together, and the Liberal party was practically unrepresented. It seemed as if there was no Liberal party. It seemed impossible that a Labour candidate could achieve anything but complete disaster at the polls. It seemed incredible that in the past a Liberal candidate had ever been returned. Edwin began, even in the privacy of his own heart, to be apologetic for his Liberalism. All these excellent fellows could not be wrong. The moral force of numbers intimidated him. He suspected that there was, after all, more to be said for Conservatism than he had hitherto allowed himself to suppose.

III

And the Felons were so good-humoured and kindly and so free-handed, and, with it all, so boyish! They burst into praise of one another on the slenderest excuse. They ordered more champagne as carelessly as though champagne were ginger-beer (Edwin was glad that by an excess of precaution he had brought two pounds in his pocket—the scale of expenditure was staggering); and they nonchalantly smoked cigars that would have made Edwin sick. They knew all about cigars and about drinks, and they implied by their demeanour, though they never said, that a first-class drink and a first-class smoke were the ‘good things’ of life, the ultimate rewards; the references to women were sly. . . . Edwin was like a demure cat among a company of splendid curly dogs.

The toasts, every one of them, called forth enthusiasm. Even in the early part of the evening much good-nature had bubbled out when, at intervals, a slim young bachelor of fifty, armed with a violent mallet, had rapped authoritatively on the table and cried: “Mr. President wishes to take wine with Mr. Vice,” “Mr. President wishes to take wine with the bachelors on the right,” “Mr. President wishes to take wine with the married Felons on the left,” and so on till every sort and condition and geographical situation had been thus distinguished. But the toasts proper aroused displays of the

most affectionate loving-kindness. Each reference to a Felon was greeted with warm cheers, and each reference touched the superlative of laudation. Every stroke of humour was noisily approved, and every exhibition of tender feeling effusively endorsed. And all the estates of the realm, and all the institutions of the realm and of the town, and all the services of war and peace, and all the official castes were handsomely and unreservedly praised, and their health and prosperity pledged with enthusiastic fervour. The organism of the Empire was pronounced to be essentially perfect. Nobody of importance, from the Queen's Majesty to the 'ministers of the Established Church and other denominations,' was omitted from the certificate of supreme excellence and efficiency. And even when an alderman, proposing the toast of the 'town and trade of Bursley,' mentioned certain disturbing symptoms in the demeanour of the lower classes, he immediately added his earnest conviction that the 'heart of the country beat true,' and was comforted with grave applause.

Towards the end of the toast-list one of the humorous vocal quartets which were designed to relieve the seriousness of the programme, was interrupted by the formidable sound of the governed proletariat beyond the walls of the Town Hall. And Edwin's memory, making him feel very old, leapt suddenly back into another generation of male glee-singers that did not disport humorously and that would not have permitted themselves to be interrupted by the shouting of populations; and he recalled 'Loud Ocean's Roar,' and the figure of Florence Simcox flitted in front of him. The proletariat was cheering somebody. The cheers died down. And in another moment the Conservative candidate burst into the room, and was followed by two of his friends (the latter in evening-dress), whom he presented to the President. The ceremonious costume impressed the President himself, for at this period of ancient history Felons dined in frock-coats or cutaways; it proved that the wearers were so accustomed to wearing evening-dress of a night that they put it on by sheer habit and inadvertence even for electioneering. The candidate only desired to shake hands with a few supporters and to assure the President that nothing but hard necessity had kept him

away from the dinner. Amid inspiring bravoes and hurrahs he fled, followed by his friends, and it became known that one of these was a baronet.

After this the vote of thanks to the President scarcely escaped being an anti-climax. And several men left, including Albert Benbow, who had once or twice glanced at his watch. "She won't let you be out after half-past ten, eh, Benbow?" said jocularly a neighbour. And Albert, laughing at the joke, nevertheless looked awkward. And the neighbour perceived that he had been perhaps a trifle clumsy. Edwin, since the mysterious influence in the background was his own sister, had to share Albert's confusion. He, too, would have departed. But Osmond Orgreave absolutely declined to let him go, and to prevent him from going used the force which good wine gives.

IV

The company divided itself into intimate groups, leaving empty white spaces at the disordered tables. The attendants now served whisky, and more liqueurs and coffee. Those guests who knew no qualm lighted fresh cigars; a few produced beloved pipes; the others were content with cigarettes. Some one ordered a window to be opened, and then, when the fresh night air began to disturb the curtains and scatter the fumes of the banquet, some one else crept aside and furtively closed it again.

Edwin found himself with Jos Curtenty and Osmond Orgreave and a few others. He felt gay and enheartened; he felt that there was a great deal of pleasure to be had on earth with very little trouble. Politics had been broached, and he made a mild joke about the Tory candidate. And amid the silence that followed it he mistily perceived that the remainder of the group, instead of becoming more jolly, had grown grave. For them the political situation was serious. They did not trouble to argue against the Labour candidate. All their reasoning was based on the assumption, which nobody denied or questioned, that at any cost the Labour candidate must be defeated. The success of the Labour candidate was regarded as a calamity. It would jeopardize the entire social order. It would deliver into the destroying hands of an

ignorant, capricious, and unscrupulous rabble all that was best in English life. It would even mean misery for the rabble itself. The tones grew more solemn. And Edwin, astonished, saw that beneath the egotism of their success, beneath their unconscious arrogance due to the habit of authority, there was a profound and genuine patriotism and sense of duty. And he was abashed. Nevertheless, he had definitely taken sides, and out of mere self-respect he had gently to remind them of the fact. Silence would have been cowardly.

"Then what about 'trusting to the people'?" he murmured, smiling.

"If trusting to the people means being under the thumb of the British working man, my boy," said Osmond Orgreave, "you can scratch me out, for one."

Edwin had never heard him speak so colloquially.

"I've always found 'em pretty decent," said Edwin, but lamely.

Jos Curtenty fixed him with a grim eye.

"How many hands do you employ, Mr. Clayhanger?"

"Fourteen," said Edwin.

"Do you?" exclaimed another voice, evidently surprised and impressed.

Jos Curtenty pulled at his cigar. "I wish I could make as much money as you make out of fourteen hands!" said he. "Well, I've got two hundred of 'em at my place. And I know 'em! I've known 'em for forty years and more. There's not ten of 'em as I'd trust to do an honest day's work, of their own accord. . . . And after the row in '80, when they'd agreed to arbitration—fifteen thousand of 'em—did they accept the award, or didn't they? Tell me that, if it isn't troubling ye too much."

Only in the last phrase did the irrepressible humorous card in him assert itself.

Edwin mumbled inarticulately. His mind was less occupied by politics than by the fact that in the view of all these men he had already finally and definitely taken the place of his father. But for the inquiries made at intervals during the evening, he might have supposed that Darius, lying in helpless obscurity up there at Bleakridge, had been erased from the memory of the town.

A crony who had not hitherto spoken began to give sarcastic and apparently damning details of the early record of the Labour candidate. Among other delinquencies the fellow had condoned the inexcusable rejection of the arbitrators' award long ago. And then some one said :

" Hello ! Here's Benbow back again ! "

Albert, in overcoat and cap, beckoned to Edwin, who sprang up, pricked into an exaggerated activity by his impatient conscience.

" It's nothing particular," said Albert at the door. " But the missus has been round to your father's to-night, and it seems the nurse has knocked up. She thought I'd perhaps better come along and tell you, in case you hadn't gone."

" Knocked up, has she ? " said Edwin. " Well, it's not to be wondered at. Nurse or no nurse, she's got no more notion of looking after herself than anybody else has. I was just going. It's only a little after eleven."

The last thing he heard on quitting the precincts of the banqueting chamber was the violent sound of the mallet. Its wielder seemed to have developed a slight affection for the senseless block of wood.

CHAPTER XVI

AFTER THE BANQUET

I

“**Y**ES, yes,” said Edwin, impatiently, in reply to some anxious remark of Maggie’s, “I shall be all right with him. Don’t you worry till morning.”

They stood at the door of the sick-room, Edwin in an attitude almost suggesting that he was pushing her out.

He had hurried home from the festival, and found the doctor just leaving and the house in a commotion. Dr. Heve said mildly that he was glad Edwin had come, and he hinted that some general calming influence was needed. Nurse Shaw had developed one of the sudden abscesses in the ear which troubled her from time to time. This radiant and apparently strong creature suffered from an affection of the ear. Once her left ear had kept her in bed for six weeks, and she had arisen with the drum pierced. Since which episode there had always been the danger, when the evil recurred, of the region of the brain being contaminated through the tiny orifice in the drum. Hence, even if the acute pain which she endured had not forced her to abandon other people’s maladies for the care of her own, the sense of her real peril would have done so. This masterful, tireless woman, whom no sadness nor abomination of her habitual environment could depress or daunt, lived under a menace, and was sometimes laid low, like a child. She rested now in Maggie’s room, with a poultice for a pillow. A few hours previously no one in the house had guessed that she had any weakness whatever. Her collapse gave to Maggie an excellent opportunity, such as Maggie loved, to prove that she was equal to a situation. Maggie would not permit Mrs. Hamps to be sent for. Nor would she permit Mrs. Nixon to remain up. She was excited and very fatigued, and she meant to manage the night with

the sole aid of Jane. It was even part of her plan that Edwin should go to bed as usual—poor Edwin, with all the anxieties of business upon his head! But she had not allowed for Edwin's conscience, nor foreseen what the doctor would say to him privately. Edwin had learnt from the doctor—a fact which the women had not revealed to him—that his father during the day had shown symptoms of 'Cheyne-Stokes breathing,' the final and the worst phenomenon of his disease; a phenomenon, too, interestingly rare. The doctor had done all that could be done by injections, and there was absolutely nothing else for anybody to do except watch.

"I shall come in in the night," Maggie whispered.

Behind them the patient vaguely stirred and groaned in his recess.

"You'll do no such thing," said Edwin shortly. "Get all the sleep you can."

"But nurse has to have a fresh poultice every two hours," Maggie protested.

"Now, look here!" Edwin was cross. "Do show a little sense. Get—all—the—sleep—you—can. We shall be having you ill next, and then there'll be a nice kettle of fish. I won't have you coming in here. I shall be perfectly all right. Now!" He gave a gesture that she should go at once.

"You won't be fit for the shop to-morrow."

"Damn the shop!"

"Well, you know where everything is." She was resigned. "If you want to make some tea——"

"All right, all right!" He forced himself to smile.

She departed, and he shut the door.

"Confounded nuisance women are!" he thought, half indulgently, as he turned towards the bed. But it was his conscience that was a confounded nuisance. He ought never to have allowed himself to be persuaded to go to the banquet. When his conscience annoyed him, it was usually Maggie who felt the repercussion.

II

Darius was extremely ill. Every part of his physical organism was deranged and wearied out. His features combined the expression of intense fatigue with the sinister liveli-

ness of an acute tragic apprehension. His failing faculties were kept horribly alert by the fear of what was going to happen to him next. So much that was appalling had already happened to him ! He wanted repose ; he wanted surcease ; he wanted nothingness. He was too tired to move, but he was also too tired to lie still. And thus he writhed faintly on the bed ; his body seemed to have that vague appearance of general movement which a multitude of insects will give to a piece of decaying matter. His skin was sick, and his hair, and his pale lips. The bed could not be kept tidy for five minutes.

" He's bad, no mistake ! " thought Edwin, as he met his father's anxious and intimidated gaze. He had never seen anyone so ill. He knew now what disease could do.

" Where's Nurse ? " the old man murmured, with excessive feebleness, his voice captiously rising to a shrill complaint.

" She's not well. She's lying down. I'm going to sit with you to-night. Have a drink ? " As Edwin said these words in his ordinary voice, it seemed to him that in comparison with his father he was a god of miraculous proud strength and domination.

Darius nodded.

" Her's a Tartar ! " Darius muttered. " But her's just. Her will have her own way ! " He often spoke thus of the nurse, giving people to understand that during the long nights, when he was left utterly helpless to the harsh mercy of the nurse, he had to accept many humiliations. He seemed to fear and love her as a dog its master. Edwin, using his imagination to realize the absoluteness of the power which the nurse had over Darius during ten hours in every twenty-four, was almost frightened by it. " By Jove ! " he thought, " I wouldn't be in his place with any woman on earth ! " The old man's lips closed clumsily round the funnel of the invalid's cup that Edwin offered. Then he sank back, and shut his eyes, and appeared calmer.

Edwin smoothed the clothes, stared at him a long time, and finally sat down in the arm-chair by the fire. He wound up his watch. It was not yet midnight. He took off his boots and put on the slippers which now Darius had not worn for over a week and would not wear again. He yawned

heavily. The yawn surprised him. He perceived that his head was throbbing and his mouth dry, and that the meats and liquors of the banquet, having ceased to stimulate, were incommoding him. His mind and body were in reaction. He reflected cynically upon the facile self-satisfactions of those successful men in whose company he had been. The whole dinner grew unreal. Nothing was real except imprisonment on a bed night and day, day and night for weeks. Every one could have change and rest save his father. For his father there was no relief, not a moment's. He was always there, in the same recess, prone, in subjection, helpless, hopeless, and suffering. Politics! What were they?

III

He closed his eyes, because it occurred to him that to do so would be agreeable. And he was awakened from a doze by a formidable stir on the bed. Darius's breathing was quick and shallow, and growing more so. He lifted his head from the pillow in order to breathe, and leaned on one elbow. Edwin sprang up and went to him.

"Clara! Clara! Don't leave me!" the old man cried in tones of agonized apprehension.

"It's all right; I'm here," said Edwin reassuringly. And he took the sick man's hot, crackling hand and held it.

Gradually the breathing went slower and deeper, and at length Darius sighed very deeply as at a danger past, and relaxed his limbs, and Edwin let go his hand. But he had not been at ease more than a few seconds when the trouble recommenced, and he was fighting again, and with appreciably more difficulty, to get air down into his lungs. It entered in quantities smaller and smaller, until it seemed scarcely to reach his throat before it was expelled again. The respirations were as rapid as the ticking of a watch. Despite his feebleness Darius wrenched his limbs into contortions, and gripped fiercely Edwin's hands.

"Clara! Clara!" he cried once more.

"It's all right. You're all right. There's nothing to be afraid of," said Edwin, soothing him.

And that paroxysm also passed, and the old man moaned in the melancholy satisfaction of deep breaths. But the

mysterious disturbing force would not leave him in peace. In another moment yet a fresh struggle was commencing. And each was worse than the last. And it was always Clara to whom he turned for succour. Not Maggie, who had spent nearly forty years in his service, and never spoke ill-naturedly of him ; but Clara, who was officious rather than helpful, who wept for him in his presence, and said harsh things behind his back, and who had never forgiven him since the refusal of the loan to Albert.

After he had passed through a dozen crises of respiration Edwin said to himself that the next one could not be worse. But it was worse. Darius breathed like a blown dog that has fallen. He snatched furiously at breath like a tiger snatching at meat. He accomplished exertions that would have exhausted an athlete, and when he had saved his life in the very instant of its loss, calling on Clara as on God, he would look at Edwin for confirmation of his hope that he had escaped again. The paroxysms continued, still growing more critical. Edwin was aghast at his own helplessness. He could do absolutely naught. It was even useless to hold the hand or to speak sympathy and reassurance. Darius at the keenest moment of battle was too occupied with his enemy to hear or feel the presence of a fellow-creature. He was solitary with his unseen enemy, and if the room had been full of ministering angels he would still have been alone and unsuccoured. He might have been sealed up in a cell with his enemy who, incredibly cruel, withheld from him his breath ; and Edwin outside the cell trying foolishly to get in. He asked for little ; he would have been content with very little ; but it was refused him until despair had reached the highest agony.

IV

“ He’s dying, I do believe,” thought Edwin, and the wonder of this nocturnal adventure sent tremors down his spine. He faced the probability that at the next bout his father would be worsted. Should he fetch Maggie and then go for the doctor ? Heve had told him that it would be ‘ pretty bad,’ and that nothing on earth could be done. No ! He would not fetch Maggie, and he would not go for the doctor. What use ? He would see the thing through. In the solemnity of the night

he was glad that an experience tremendous and supreme had been vouchsafed to him. He knew now what the will to live was. He saw life naked, stripped of everything unessential. He saw life and death together. What caused his lip to curl when the thought of the Felon's dinner flashed through his mind was the damned complacency of the Felons. Did any of them ever surmise that they had never come within ten miles of life itself, that they were attaching importance to the most futile trifles? Let them see a human animal in a crisis of Cheyne-Stokes breathing, and they would know something about reality! . . . So this was Cheyne-Stokes breathing, that rare and awful affliction! What was it? What caused it? What controlled its frequency? No answer! Not only could he do naught, he knew naught! He was equally useless and ignorant before the affrighting mystery.

Darius no longer sat up and twisted himself in the agony of the struggles. He lay flat, resigned but still obstinate, fighting with the only muscles that could fight now, those of his chest and throat. The enemy had got him down, but he would not surrender. Time after time he won a brief armistice in the ruthless altercation, and breathed deep and long, and sighed as if he would doze, and then his enemy was at him again, and Darius, aroused afresh to the same terror, summoned Clara in the extremity of his anguish.

Edwin moved away, and surveyed the bed from afar. The old man was perfectly oblivious of him. He looked at his watch, and timed the crises. They recurred fairly regularly about every hundred seconds. Thirty-six times an hour Darius, growing feebler, fought unaided and without hope of aid an enemy growing stronger, and would not yield. He was dragged to his death thirty-six times every hour, and thirty-six times managed to scramble back from the edge of the chasm. Occasionally his voice, demanding that Clara should not desert him, made a shriek which seemed loud enough to wake the street. Edwin listened for any noise in the house, but heard nothing.

V

A curious instinct drove him out of the room for a space on to the landing. He shut the door on the human animal

in its lonely struggle. The gas was burning on the landing and also in the hall, for this was not a night on which to extinguish lights. The clock below ticked quietly, and then struck three. He had passed more than three hours with his father. The time had gone quickly. He crept to Maggie's door. No sound! Utter silence! He crept upstairs to the second storey. No sound there! Coming down again to the first floor he noticed that the door of his own bedroom was open. He crept in there, and started violently to see a dim form on the bed. It was Maggie, dressed, but fast asleep under a rug. He left her. The whole world was asleep, and he was awake with his father.

"What an awful shame!" he thought savagely. "Why couldn't we have let him grow his mushrooms if he wanted to? What harm would it have done us? Supposing it *had* been a nuisance, supposing he *had* tried to kiss Jane, supposing he *had* hurt himself, what then? Why couldn't we let him do what he wanted?"

And he passionately resented his own harshness and that of Maggie as he might have resented the cruelty of some national injustice.

He listened. Nothing but the ticking of the clock disturbed the calm of the night. Could his father have expired in one of those frantic bouts with his enemy? Brusquely, with false valiance, he re-entered the chamber, and saw again the white square of the blind and the expanse of carpet and the tables littered with nursing apparatus, and saw the bed and his father on it, panting in a new and unsurpassable despair, but still unbeaten, under the thin gas-flame. The crisis eased as he went in. He picked up the arm-chair and carried it to the bedside and sat down facing his father, and once more took his father's intolerably pathetic hand.

"All right!" he murmured, and never before had he spoken with such tenderness. "All right! I'm here. I'm not leaving you."

The victim grew quieter.

"Is it Edwin?" he whispered, scarcely articulate, out of a bottomless depth of weakness.

"Yes," said Edwin cheerfully; "you're a bit better now, aren't you?"

"Aye!" sighed Darius in hope.

And almost immediately the rumour of struggle recommenced, and in a minute the crisis was at its fiercest.

Edwin became hardened to the spectacle. He reasoned with himself about suffering. After all, what was its importance? Up to a point it could be borne, and when it could not be borne it ceased to be suffering. The characteristic grimness of those latitudes showed itself in him. There was nothing to be done. They who were destined to suffer had to suffer, must suffer; and no more could be said. The fight must come to an end sooner or later. Fortitude alone could meet the situation. Nevertheless, the night seemed eternal, and at intervals fortitude lacked.

"By Jove!" he would mutter aloud, under the old man's constant appeals to Clara, "I shan't be sorry when this is over."

Then he would interest himself in the periodicity of the attacks, timing them by his watch with care. Then he would smooth the bed. Once he looked at the fire. It was out. He had forgotten it. He immediately began to feel chilly, and then he put on his father's patched dressing-gown and went to the window, and, drawing aside the blind, glanced forth. All was black and utterly silent. He thought with disdain of Maggie and the others unconscious in sleep. He returned to the chair.

VI

He was startled, at a side glance, by something peculiar in the appearance of the window. It was the first messenger of the dawn. Yes, a faint greyness, very slowly working in secret against the power of the gaslight: timid, delicate, but brightening by imperceptible degrees into strength.

"Some of them will be getting up soon, now," he said to himself. The hour was between four and half-past. He looked forward to release. Maggie was sure to come and release him shortly. And even as he held the sick man's arm, comforting him, he yawned.

But no one came. Five o'clock, half-past five! The first car rumbled down. And still the victim, unbroken, went through his agony every two minutes or oftener, with the most frightful regularity.

He extinguished the gas, and lo ! there was enough daylight to see clearly. He pulled up the blind. The night had gone. He had been through the night. The entire surface of his head was tingling. Now he would look at the martyrdom of the victim as at a natural curiosity, having no capacity left for feeling. And now his sympathy would gush forth anew, and he would cover with attentions his father, who, fiercely preoccupied with the business of obtaining breath, gave no heed to them. And now he would stand impressed, staggered, by the magnificence of the struggle.

The suspense from six to seven was the longest. When would somebody come ? Had the entire household taken laudanum ? He would go and rouse Maggie. No, he would not. He was too proud.

At a quarter-past seven the knob of the door clicked softly. He could scarcely believe his ears. Maggie entered. Darius was easier between two crises.

"Well," said she tranquilly, "how is he ?" She was tying her apron.

"Pretty bad," Edwin answered, with affected nonchalance.

"Nurse is a bit better. I've given her three fresh poultices since midnight. You'd better go now, hadn't you ?"

"All right. I've let the fire out."

"I'll tell Jane to light it. She's just making some tea for you."

He went. He did not need twice telling. As he went, carelessly throwing off the dressing-gown and picking up his boots, Darius began to pant afresh, to nerve himself instinctively afresh for another struggle. Edwin, strong and healthy, having done nothing but watch, was completely exhausted. But Darius, weakened by disease, having fought a couple of hundred terrific and excruciating encounters, each a supreme battle, in the course of a single night, was still drawing upon the apparently inexhaustible reserves of his volition.

"I couldn't have stood that much longer," said Edwin, out on the landing.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CHAIN BROKEN

I

SHORTLY after eight o'clock Edwin was walking down Trafalgar Road on his way to the shop. He had bathed, and drunk some tea, and under the stimulation he felt the factitious vivacity of excessive fatigue. Rain had fallen quietly and perseveringly during the night, and though the weather was now fine the streets were thick with black mire. Paintresses with their neat gloves and their dinner-baskets and their thin shoes were trudging to work, and young clerks and shop-assistants and the upper classes of labour generally. Everybody was in a hurry. The humbler mass had gone long ago. Miners had been in the earth for hours. Later, and more leisurely, the magnates would pass by.

There were carriages about. An elegant wagonette, streaming with red favours, dashed down the road behind two horses. Its cargo was a handful of clay-soiled artisans, gleeful in the naïve pride of their situation, wearing red and shouting red, and hurraing for the Conservative candidate.

"Asses!" murmured Edwin, with acrid and savage disdain. "Do you think he'd drive you anywhere to-morrow?" He walked on a little, and broke forth again, all to himself: "Of course he's doing it solely in your interest, isn't he? Why doesn't he pick some of these paintresses out of the mud and give them a drive?"

He cultivated an unreasoning anger against the men who had so impressed him at the banquet. He did not try to find answers to their arguments. He accused them stoutly of wilful blindness, of cowardice, of bullying, of Pharisaism, and of other sins. He had no wish to hear their defence. He condemned them, and as it were ordered them to be taken away and executed. He had a profound conviction that

argument was futile, and that nothing would serve but a pitched battle, in which each fighting man should go to the poll and put a cross against a name in grim silence. Argue with these gross self-satisfied fellows about the turpitude of the artisans! Why, there was scarcely one of them whose grandfather had not been an artisan! Curse their patriotism! Then he would begin bits of argument to himself, and stop them, too impatient to continue. . . . The shilling cigars of those feasters disgusted him. . . . In such wise his mind ran. And he was not much kinder to the artisan. If scorn could have annihilated, there would have been no proletariat left in the division. . . . Men? Sheep rather! Letting themselves be driven up and down like that, and believing all the yarns that were spun to them! Gaping idiots, they would swallow any mortal thing! There was simply naught that they were not stupid enough to swallow with a glass of beer. It would serve them right if—— However, that could not happen. Idiocy had limits. At least he presumed it had.

Early as it was, the number of carriages was already considerable. But he did not see one with the blue of the Labour candidate. Blue rosettes there were, but the red rosettes bore them down easily. Even dogs had been adorned with red rosettes, and nice clean infants! And on all the hoardings were enormous red posters exhorting the shrewd common-sense potter not to be misled by paid agitators, but to plump for his true friend, for the man who was anxious to devote his entire career and goods to the welfare of the potter and the integrity of the Empire.

II

"If you can give me three days off, sir," said Big James, in the majestic humility of his apron, "I shall take it kindly."

Edwin had gone into the composing room with the copy for a demy poster, consisting of four red words to inform the public that the true friend of the public was 'romping in.' A hundred posters were required within an hour. He had nearly refused the order, in his feverish fatigue and his disgust, but some remnant of sagacity had asserted itself in him and saved him from this fatuity.

"Why?" he asked roughly. "What's up now, James?"

"My old comrade Abraham Harracles is dead, sir, at Glasgow, and I'm wishful for to attend the interment, far as it is. He was living with his daughter, and she's written to me. If you could make it convenient to spare me——"

"Of course, of course!" Edwin interrupted him hastily. In his present mood, it revolted him that a man of between fifty and sixty should be humbly asking as a favour to be allowed to fulfil a pious duty.

"I'm very much obliged to you, sir," said Big James simply, quite unaware that captious Edwin found his gratitude excessive and servile. "I'm the last now, sir, of the old glee-party," he added.

"Really!"

Big James nodded, and said quietly, "And how's the old gentleman, sir?"

Edwin shook his head.

"I'm sorry, sir," said Big James.

"I've been up with him all night," Edwin told him.

"I wonder if you'd mind dropping me a line to Glasgow, sir, if anything happens. I can give you the address. If it isn't——"

"Certainly, if you like." He tried to be nonchalant. "When are you going?"

"I did think of getting to Crewe before noon, sir. As soon as I've seen to this——" He cocked his eye at the copy for the poster.

"Oh, you needn't bother about that," said Edwin carelessly. "Go now if you want to."

"I've got time, sir. Mr. Curtenty's coming for me at nine o'clock to drive me to th' polling-booth."

This was the first time that Edwin had ever heard Big James talk of his private politics. The fact was that Big James was no more anxious than Jos Curtenty and Osmond Orgreave to put himself under the iron heel of his fellow working-man.

"And what's *your* colour, James?" His smile was half a sneer.

"If you'll pardon me saying so, sir, I'm for Her Most Gracious," Big James answered with grave dignity.

Three journeymen, pretending to be busy, were listening with all ears from the other side of a case.

"Oh!" exclaimed Edwin, dashed. "Well, that's all right!"

He walked straight out, put on his hat, and went to the Bleakridge polling-station and voted Labour defiantly, as though with a personal grievance against the polling-clerk. He had a vote, not as lessee of the business premises, but as his father's lodger. He despised Labour; he did not care what happened to Labour. In voting for Labour, he seemed to have the same satisfaction as if from pique he had voted against it because its stupidity had incensed him.

Then, instead of returning him to the shop, his legs took him home and upstairs, and he lay down in his own room.

III

He was awakened by the presence of some one at his bedside, and the whole of his body protested against the disturbance.

"I couldn't make you hear with knocking," said Dr. Heve, "so I came into the room."

"Hello, doctor, is that you?" Edwin sat up, dazed, and with a sensation of large waves passing in slow succession through his head. "I must have dropped asleep."

"I hear you had a pretty bad night with him," the doctor remarked.

"Yes. It's a mystery to me how he could keep it up."

"I was afraid you would. Well, he's quieter now. In fact, he's unconscious."

"Unconscious, is he?"

"You'll have no more trouble with the old gentleman," said the doctor. He was looking at the window, as though at some object of great interest to be seen thence. His tone was gentle and unaffected. For the twentieth time Edwin privately admitted that in spite of the weak, vacuous smile which seemed to delight everybody except himself, there was a sympathetic quality in this bland doctor. In common moments he was common, but in the rare moment when a man with such a smile ought to be at his worst, a certain soft dignity would curiously distinguish his bearing.

"Um!" Edwin muttered, also looking at the window. And then, after a pause, he asked: "Will it last long?"

"I don't know," said the doctor. "The fact is, this is the first case of Cheyne-Stokes breathing I've ever had. It may last for days."

"How's the nurse?" Edwin demanded.

They talked about the nurse, and then Dr. Heve said that, his brother the Vicar and he having met in the street, they had come in together, as the Vicar was anxious to have news of his old acquaintance's condition. It appeared that the Vicar was talking to Maggie and Janet in the drawing-room.

"Well," said Edwin, "I shan't come down. Tell him I'm only presentable enough for doctors."

With a faint smile and a nod, the doctor departed. As soon as he had gone, Edwin jumped off the bed and looked at his watch, which showed two o'clock. No doubt dinner was over. No doubt Maggie had decided that it would be best to leave him alone to sleep. But that day neither he nor anybody in the household had the sense of time, the continuous consciousness of what the hour was. The whole systematized convention of existence was deranged, and all values transmuted. Edwin was aware of no feeling whatever except an intensity of curiosity to see again in tranquillity the being with whom he had passed the night. Pushing his hand through his hair, he hurried into the sick-room. It was all tidy and fresh, as though nothing had ever happened in it. Mrs. Nixon, shrivelled and deaf, sat in the arm-chair, watching. No responsibility now attached to the vigil, and so it could be left to the aged and almost useless domestic. She gave a gesture which might have meant anything—despair, authority, pride, grief.

Edwin stood by the bedside and gazed. Darius lay on his back, with eyes half-open, motionless, unseeing, unhearing, and he breathed faintly, with the soft regularity of an infant. The struggle was finished, and he had emerged from it with the right to breathe. His hair had been brushed, and his beard combed. It was uncanny, this tidiness, this calm, this passivity. The memory of the night grew fantastic and remote. Surely the old man must spring up frantically in a

moment, to beat off his enemy ! Surely his agonized cry for Clara must be ringing through the room ! But nothing of him stirred. Air came and went through those parted and relaxed lips with the perfect efficiency of a healthy natural function. And yet he was not asleep. His obstinate and tremendous spirit was now withdrawn somewhere, into some fastness more recondite than sleep ; not far off, not detached, not dethroned ; but undiscoverably hidden, and beyond any summons. Edwin gazed and gazed, until his heart could hold no more of the emotion which this mysteriously impressive spectacle, at once majestic and poignant, distilled into it. Then he silently left the old woman sitting dully by the spirit concealed in its ruined home.

IV

In the evening he was resting on the sofa in the drawing-room. Auntie Hamps was near him, at work on some embroidery. In order that her dear Edwin might doze a little if he could, she refrained from speech ; from time to time she stopped her needle and looked reflectively at the morsel of fire, or at the gas. She had been in the house since before tea. Clara also had passed most of the day there, with a few intervals at her own home ; but now Clara was gone, and Janet too had gone. Darius was tiring them all out, in his mild and senseless repose. He remained absolutely still, and the enigma which he so indifferently offered to them might apparently continue for ever ; at any rate the doctor's statement that he might keep as he was for days and days, beyond help, hung over the entire household, discouraging and oppressive. The energy of even Auntie Hamps was baffled. Only Alicia, who had come in, as she said, to take Janet's place, insisted on being occupied. This was one of the nights dedicated by family arrangement to her betrothed, but Alicia had found pleasure in sacrificing herself, and him, to her very busy sense of duty.

Suddenly the drawing-room door was pushed open, without a sound, and Alicia, in all the bursting charm of her youthfulness and the delicious *naïveté* of her self-importance, stood in the doorway. She made no gesture ; she just looked at Edwin with a peculiar ominous and excited glance, and Edwin rose

quickly and left the room. Auntie Hamps had noticed nothing.

"Maggie wants you upstairs," said Alicia to Edwin.

He made no answer. He did not ask where Maggie was. They went upstairs together. But at the door of the sick-room Alicia hung back, intimidated, and Edwin entered and shut the door on that beautiful image of proud, throbbing life.

Maggie, standing by the bed under the gas which blazed at full, turned to him as he approached.

"Just come and look at him," she said quietly.

Darius lay in exactly the same position; except that his mouth was open a little wider, he presented exactly the same appearance as in the afternoon. His weary features, pitiful and yet grim, had exactly the same expression. But there was no sign of breathing. Edwin bent and listened.

"Oh! He's dead!" he murmured.

Maggie nodded, her eyes glittering as though set with diamonds. "I think so," she said.

"When was it?"

"Scarcely a minute ago. I was sitting there, by the fire, and I thought I noticed something——"

"What did you notice?"

"I don't know . . . I must go and tell nurse."

She went, wiping her eyes.

Edwin, now alone, looked again at the residue of his father. The spirit, after hiding within so long, had departed and left no trace. It had done with that form and was away. The vast and forlorn adventure of the little boy from the Bastille was over. Edwin did not know that the little boy from the Bastille was dead. He only knew that his father was dead. It seemed intolerably tragic that the enfeebled wreck should have had to bear so much, and yet intolerably tragic also that death should have relieved him. But Edwin's distress was shot through and enlightened by his solemn satisfaction at the fact that destiny had allotted to him, Edwin, an experience of such profound and overwhelming grandeur. His father was, and lo! he was not. That was all, but it was ineffable.

Maggie returned to the room, followed by Nurse Shaw, whose head was enveloped in various bandages. Edwin began to

anticipate all the tedious formalities, as to which he would have to inform himself, of registration and interment. . . .

V

Ten o'clock. The news was abroad in the house. Alicia had gone to spread it. Maggie had startled everybody by deciding to go down and tell Clara herself, though Albert was bound to call. The nurse had laid out the corpse. Auntie Hamps and Edwin were again in the drawing-room together ; the ageing lady was making up her mind to go. Edwin, in search of an occupation, prepared to write letters to one or two distant relatives of his mother. Then he remembered his promise to Big James, and decided to write that letter first.

"What a mercy he passed away peacefully!" Auntie Hamps exclaimed, not for the first time.

Edwin, at a rickety fancy desk, began to write: "Dear James, my father passed peacefully away at—" Then, with an abrupt movement, he tore the sheet in two and threw it in the fire, and began again: "Dear James, my father died quietly at eight o'clock to-night."

Soon afterwards, when Mrs. Hamps had departed with her genuine but too spectacular grief, Edwin heard an immense commotion coming down the road from Hanbridge: cheers, shouts, squeals, penny whistles, and trumpets. He opened the gate.

"Who's in?" he asked a stout, shabby man, who was gesticulating in glee with a little Tory flag on the edge of the crowd.

"Who do *you* think, mister?" replied the man drunkenly.

"What majority?"

"Four hundred and thirty-nine."

The integrity of the empire was assured, and the paid agitator had received a proper rebuff.

"Miserable idiots!" Edwin murmured, with the most extraordinary violence of scorn, as he re-entered the house, and the blare of triumph receded. He was very much surprised. He had firmly expected his own side to win, though he was reconciled to a considerable reduction of the old majority. His lips curled.

It was in his resentment, in the hard setting of his teeth as he confirmed himself in the rightness of his own opinions, that he first began to realize an individual freedom. "I don't care if we're beaten forty times," his thoughts ran. "I'll be a more out-and-out Radical than ever! I don't care, and I don't care!" And he felt sturdily that he was free. The chain was at last broken that had bound together those two beings so dissimilar, antagonistic, and ill-matched—Edwin Clayhanger and his father.

BOOK IV

HIS START IN LIFE

CHAPTER I

THE BIRTHDAY VISIT

I

IT was Auntie Hamps's birthday.
"She must be quite fifty-nine," said Maggie.
"Oh, stuff!" Edwin contradicted her curtly. "She can't be anything like as much as that."

Having by this positive and sharp statement disposed of the question of Mrs. Hamps's age, he bent again with eagerness to his newspaper. The "Manchester Examiner" no longer existing as a Radical organ, he read the "Manchester Guardian," of which that morning's issue contained a long and vivid obituary of Charles Stewart Parnell.

Brother and sister were at breakfast. Edwin had changed the character of this meal. He went fasting to business at eight o'clock, opened correspondence, and gave orders to the wonderful Stifford, a person now of real importance in the firm, and at nine o'clock flew by car back to the house to eat bacon and eggs and marmalade leisurely, like a gentleman. It was known that between nine and ten he could not be seen at the shop.

"Well," Maggie continued, with her mild persistence, "Aunt Spenser told me——"

"Who's Aunt Spenser, in God's name?"

"You know—mother's and auntie's cousin—the fat old thing!"

"Oh! Her!" He recalled one of the unfamiliar figures that had bent over his father's coffin.

"She told me auntie was either fifty-five or fifty-six, at father's funeral. And *that's* nearly three and a half years ago. So she must be——"

"Two and a half, you mean," Edwin interrupted with a sort of savageness.

"No, I don't. It's nearly three years since Mrs. Nixon died."

Edwin was startled to realize the passage of time. But he said nothing. Partly he wanted to read in peace, and partly he did not want to admit his mistake. Bit by bit he was assuming the historic privileges of the English master of the house. He had the illusion that if only he could maintain a silence sufficiently august his error of fact and of manner would cease to be an error.

"Yes; she must be fifty-nine," Maggie resumed placidly.

"I don't care if she's a hundred and fifty-nine!" snapped Edwin. "Any more coffee? Hot, that is."

Without moving his gaze from the paper, he pushed his cup a little way across the table.

Maggie took it, her chin slightly lifting, and her cheeks showing a touch of red.

"I hope you didn't forget to order the inkstand, after all," she said stiffly. "It's not been sent up yet, and I want to take it down to auntie's myself this morning. You know what a lot she thinks of such things!"

It had been arranged that Auntie Hamps should receive that year a cut-glass double inkstand from her nephew and niece. The shop occasionally dealt in such articles. Edwin had not willingly assented to the choice. He considered that a cut-glass double inkstand was a vicious concession to Mrs. Hamps's very vulgar taste in knick-knacks, and, moreover, he always now discouraged retail trade at the shop. But still, he had assented, out of indolence.

"Well, it won't come till to-morrow," he said.

"But, Edwin, how's that?"

"How's that? Well, if you want to know, I didn't order it till yesterday. I can't think of everything."

"It's very annoying!" said Maggie sincerely.

Edwin put on the martyr's crown. "Some people seem to think I've nothing else to do down at my shop but order

birthday presents," he remarked with disagreeable sarcasm.

"I think you might be a little more polite," said Maggie.

"Do you!"

"Yes; I do!" Maggie insisted stoutly. "Sometime; you get positively unbearable. Everybody notices it."

"Who's everybody?"

"You never mind!"

II

Maggie tossed her head, and Edwin knew that when she tossed her head—a gesture rare with her—she was tossing the tears back from her eyes. He was more than startled, he was intimidated, by that feminine movement of the head. She was hurt. It was absurd of her to be so susceptible, but he had undoubtedly hurt her. He had been clumsy enough to hurt her. She was nearing forty, and he also was close behind her on the road to forty; she was a perfectly decent sort, and he reckoned that he, too, was a perfectly decent sort, and yet they lacked the skill not to bicker. They no longer had the somewhat noisy altercations of old days concerning real or fancied interferences with the order and privacy of Edwin's sacred chamber, but their general demeanour to one another had dully soured. It was as if they tolerated one another, from motives of self-interest. Why should this be so? They were, at bottom, affectionate and mutually respectful. In a crisis they could and would rely on one another utterly. Why should their demeanour be so false an index to their real feelings? He supposed it was just the fault of loose habit. He did not blame her. From mere pride he blamed himself. He knew himself to be cleverer, more perceptive, wiler, than she; and he ought to have been able to muster the diplomatic skill necessary for smooth and felicitous intercourse. Any friction, whether due to her stupidity or not, was a proof of his incompetence in the art of life. . . .

'Everybody notices it'! The phrase pricked him. An exaggeration, of course! Still, a phrase that would not be dismissed by a superior curl of the lips. Maggie was not Clara, and she did not invent allegations. His fault! Yes, his fault! Beyond doubt he was occasionally gruff, he was churlish, he was porcupinish. He did not mean to be so

—indeed he most honestly meant not to be so—but he was. He must change. He must turn over a new leaf. He wished it had been his own birthday, or, better still, the New Year, instead of his auntie's birthday, so that he might have turned over a new leaf at once with due solemnity. He actually remembered a pious saw uttered over twenty years earlier by that wretch in a white tie who had damnably devised the Saturday afternoon Bible-class, a saw which he furiously scorned—"Every day begins a New Year." Well, every day did begin a New Year! So did every minute. Why not begin a New Year then, in that minute? He had only to say in a cajoling, good-natured tone, "All right, all right! Keep your hair on, my child. I grovel!" He had only to say some such words, and the excellent, simple, unresentful Maggie would at once be appeased. It would be a demonstration of his moral strength to say them.

But he could not say them.

III

Nevertheless he did seriously determine to turn over a new leaf at the very next occasion. His eyes were now following the obituary of Parnell mechanically, without transmitting any message that his preoccupied brain would seize. He had been astonished to find that Parnell was only forty-five. He thought: "Why, at my age Parnell was famous—a great man and a power!" And there was he, Edwin, eating bacon and eggs opposite his sister in the humdrum dining-room at Bleakridge. But after all, what was the matter with the dining-room? It was not the dining-room that his father had left. He had altered and improved it to suit his own taste. He was free to do so, and he had done so. He was free in every way. The division of his father's estate according to the will had proved unjust to himself; but he had not cared in the least. He had let Albert do as Albert and Clara pleased. In the settlement Maggie had taken the house (at a figure too high), and he paid her an adequate rent for it, while she in turn paid him for her board and lodging. They were all in clover, thanks to the terrible lifelong obstinacy of the little boy from the Bastille. And Edwin had had the business unburdened. It was not growing, but it brought

in more than twice as much as he spent. Soon he would be as rich as either of the girls, and that without undue servitude. He bought books surpassing those books of Tom Orgreave which had once seemed so hopelessly beyond his reach. He went to the theatre. He went to concerts. He took holidays. He had been to London, and more than once. He had a few good friends. He was his own master. Nobody dreamed of saying him nay, and no bad habits held him in subjection. Everywhere he was treated with quite notable respect. Even, when partly from negligence, and partly to hide recurring pimples, he had allowed his beard to grow, Clara herself had not dared to titter. And although he suffered from certain disorders of the blood due to lack of exercise and to his condition, his health could not be called bad. The frequency of his colds had somewhat diminished. His career, which to others probably seemed dull and monotonous, presented itself to him as almost miraculously romantic in its development.

And withal he could uneasily ask himself, "Am I happy?" Maggie did not guess that, as he bent unseeing over his precious "Manchester Guardian," he was thinking: "I must hold an inquisition upon my whole way of existence. I must see where I stand. If ever I am to be alive, I ought to be alive now. And I'm not at all sure whether I am." Maggie never put such questions to herself. She went on in placidness from hour to hour, ruffled occasionally.

IV

An unusual occurrence gave him the opportunity to turn over a new leaf immediately. The sounds of the front-door bell and of voices in the hall were followed by the proud entrance of Auntie Hamps herself into the dining-room.

"Now don't disturb yourselves, please," Mrs. Hamps entreated. She often began with this phrase.

Maggie sprang up and kissed her, somewhat effusively for Maggie, and said in a quiet, restrained tone—

"Many happy returns of the day, auntie."

Then Edwin rose, scraping his arm-chair backwards along the floor, and shook hands with her, and said with a guilty grin—

"A long life and a merry one, auntie!"

"Eh!" she exclaimed, falling back with a sigh of satisfaction into a chair by the table. "I'm sure everybody's very kind. Will you believe me, those darling children of Clara's were round at my house before eight o'clock this morning!"

"Is Amy's cough better?" Maggie interjected, as she and Edwin sat down.

"Bless ye!" cried Auntie Hamps, "I was in such a fluster I forgot to ask the little toddler. But I didn't hear her cough. I do hope it is. October's a bad time for coughs to begin. I ought to have asked. But I'm getting an old woman."

"We were just arguing whether you were thirty-eight or thirty-nine, auntie," said Edwin.

"What a tease he is—with his beard!" she archly retorted. "Well, your old aunt is sixty this day."

"Sixty!" the nephew and niece repeated together in astonishment.

Auntie Hamps nodded.

"You're the finest sixty I ever saw!" said Edwin, with unaffected admiration.

And she was fine. The pride in her eye as she made the avowal—probably the first frank avowal of her age that had passed those lips for thirty years—was richly justified. With her clear, rosy complexion, her white regular teeth, her straight spine, her plump figure, her brilliant gaze, her rapid gestures, and that authentic hair of hers falling in Victorian curls, she offered to the world a figure that no one could regard without a physical pleasure and stimulation. And she was so shiningly correct in her black silk and black velvet, and in the massive jet at her throat, and in the slenderness of her shoe! It was useless to recall her duplicities, her mendacities, her hypocrisies, her meannesses. At any rate she could be generous at moments, and the splendour of her vitality sometimes, as now, hid all her faults. She would confess to aches and pains like other folk, bouts of rheumatism for example—but the high courage of her body would not deign to ratify such miserable statements; it haughtily repelled the touch of time; it kept at least the appearance of victory. If you did not like Auntie Hamps willingly, in her hours of bodily triumph, you had to like her unwillingly. Both Edwin and

Maggie had innumerable grievances against her, but she held their allegiance, and even their warm instinctive affection, on the morning of her sixtieth birthday. She had been a lone widow ever since Edwin could remember, and yet she had continued to bloom. Nothing could desiccate nor wither her. Even her sins did not find her out. God and she remained always on the best terms, and she thrived on insincerity.

V

"There's a little parcel for you, auntie," said Edwin, with a particular effort to make his voice soft and agreeable. "But it's in Manchester. It won't be here till to-morrow. My fault entirely! You know how awful I am for putting off things."

"We quite expected it would be here to-day," said the loyal Maggie, when most sisters—and Clara assuredly—would have said in an eager, sarcastic tone: "Yes, it's just like Edwin, and yet I reminded him I don't know how many times!" (Edwin felt with satisfaction that the new leaf was already turned. He was glad that he had said 'My fault entirely.' He now said to himself: "Maggie's all right, and so am I. I must keep this up. Perfect nonsense, people hinting that she and I can't get on together!")

"Please, *please!*" Auntie Hamps entreated. "Don't talk about parcels!" And yet they knew that if they had not talked about a parcel the ageing lady would have been seriously wounded. "All I want is your love. You children are all I have now. And if you knew how proud I am of you all, seeing you all so nice and good, and respected in the town, and Clara's little darlings beginning to run about, and such strong little things. If only your poor mother——!"

Impossible not to be impressed by those accents! Edwin and Maggie might writhe under Auntie Hamps's phraseology; they might remember the most horrible examples of her cant. In vain! They were impressed. They had to say to themselves: "There's something very decent about her, after all."

Auntie Hamps looked from one to the other, and at the quiet opulence of the breakfast-table, and the spacious solidities of the room. Admiration and respect were in that eye

always too masculine to weep under emotion. Undoubtedly she was proud of her nephew and nieces. And had she not the right to be? The bearded Edwin, one of the chief tradesmen in the town, and so fond of books, such a reader, and so quiet in his habits! And the two girls, with nice independent fortunes: Clara so fruitful and so winning, and Maggie so dependable, so kind! Auntie Hamps had scarce anything else to wish for. Her ideals were fulfilled. Undoubtedly since the death of Darius her attitude towards his children had acquired even a certain humility.

"Shall you be in to-morrow morning, auntie?" Maggie asked, in the constrained silence that followed Mrs. Hamps's protestations.

"Yes, I shall," said Mrs. Hamps, with assurance. "I shall be mending curtains."

"Well, then, I shall call. About eleven." Maggie turned to Edwin benevolently. "It won't be too soon if I pop in at the shop a little before eleven?"

"No," said Edwin with equal benevolence. "It's not often Sutton's delivery is after ten. That'll be all right. I'll have it unpacked."

VI

He lit a cigarette.

"Have one?" he suggested to Mrs. Hamps, holding out the case.

"I shall give you a rap over the knuckles in a minute," smiled Mrs. Hamps, who was now leaning an elbow on the table, in easy intimacy. And she went on in a peculiar tone, low, mysterious, and yet full of vivacity: "I can't quite make out who that little nephew is that Janet Orgreave is taking about."

"Little nephew that Janet's taking about!" murmured Maggie, in surprise; and to Edwin, "Do you know?"

Edwin shook his head. "When?" he asked.

"Well, this morning," said Mrs. Hamps. "I met them as I was coming up. She was on one side of the road, and the child was on the other—just opposite Howson's. My belief is she'd lost all control over the little jockey. Oh! A regular little jockey! You could see that at once. 'Now, George,

come along,' she called to him. And then he shouted, 'I want you to come on this side, auntie.' Of course I couldn't stop to see it out. She was so busy with him she only just moved to me."

"George? George?" Maggie consulted her memory. "How old was he, about?"

"Seven or eight, I should say."

"Well, it couldn't be one of Tom's children. Nor Alicia's."

"No," said Auntie Hamps. "And I always understood that the eldest daughter's—what's her name?"

"Marian."

"Marian's were all girls."

"I believe they are. Aren't they, Edwin?"

"How can I tell?" said Edwin. It was a marvel to him how his auntie collected her information. Neither she nor Clara had ever been in the slightest degree familiar with the Orgreaves, and Maggie, so far as he knew, was not a gossip. He thought he perceived, however, the explanation of Mrs. Hamps's visit. She had encountered in the street a phenomenon which would not harmonize with facts of her own knowledge, and the discrepancy had disturbed her to such an extent that she had been obliged to call in search of relief. There was that, and there was also her natural inclination to show herself off on her triumphant sixtieth birthday.

"Charles Orgreave isn't married, is he?" she inquired.

"No," said Maggie.

VII

Silence fell upon this enigma of Janet's entirely unaccountable nephew.

"Charlie *may* be married," said Edwin humorously, at length. "You never know! It's a funny world! I suppose you've seen," he looked particularly at his auntie, "that your friend Parnell's dead?"

She affected to be outraged.

"I've seen that Parnell is dead," she rebuked him, with solemn quietness. "I saw it on a poster as I came up. I don't want to be uncharitable, but it was the best thing he could do. I do hope we've heard the last of all this Home Rule now!"

Like many people Mrs. Hamps was apparently convinced that the explanation of Parnell's scandalous fall and of his early death was to be found in the inherent viciousness of the Home Rule cause, and also that the circumstances of his end were a proof that Home Rule was cursed of God. She reasoned with equal power forwards and backwards. And she was so earnest and so dignified that Edwin was sneaped into silence. Once more he could not keep from his face a look that seemed to apologize for his opinions. And all the heroic and passionate grandeur of Parnell's furious career shrivelled up to mere sordidness before the inability of one narrow-minded and ignorant but vigorous woman to appreciate its quality. Not only did Edwin feel apologetic for himself, but also for Parnell. He wished he had not tried to be funny about Parnell; he wished he had not mentioned him. The brightness of the birthday was for an instant clouded.

"I don't know what's coming over things!" Auntie Hamps murmured sadly, staring out of the window at the street gay with October sunshine. "What with that! And what with those terrible baccarat scandals. And now there's this free education, that we ratepayers have to pay for. They'll be giving the children of the working classes free meals next!" she added, with remarkably intelligent anticipation.

"Oh well! Never mind!" Edwin soothed her.

She gazed at him in loving reproach. And he felt guilty because he only went to chapel about once in two months, and even then from sheer moral cowardice.

"Can you give me those measurements, Maggie?" Mrs. Hamps asked suddenly. "I'm on my way to Brunt's."

The women left the room together. Edwin walked idly to the window. After all, he had been perhaps wrong concerning the motive of her visit. The next moment he caught sight of Janet and the unaccountable nephew, breasting the hill from Bursley, hand in hand.

CHAPTER II

JANET'S NEPHEW

I

EDWIN was a fairly conspicuous object at the dining-room window. As Janet and the child drew level with the corner her eye accidentally caught Edwin's. He nodded, smiling, and took the cigarette out of his mouth and waved it. They were old friends. He was surprised to notice that Janet blushed and became self-conscious. She returned his smile awkwardly, and then, giving a gesture to signify her intention, she came in at the gate. Which action surprised Edwin still more. With all her little freedoms of manner, Janet was essentially a woman stately and correct, and time had emphasized these qualities in her. It was not in the least like her to pay informal, capricious calls at a quarter to ten in the morning.

He went to the front door and opened it. She was persuading the child up the tiled steps. The breeze dashed gaily into the house.

"Good morning. You're out early."

"Good morning. Yes. We've just been down to the post office to send off a telegram, haven't we, George?"

She entered the hall, the boy following, and shook hands, meeting Edwin's gaze fairly. Her esteem for him, her confidence in him, shone in her troubled, candid eyes. She held herself proudly, mastering her curious constraint. "Now just see that!" she said, pointing to a fleck of black mud on the virgin elegance of her pale brown costume. Edwin thought anew, as he had often thought, that she was a distinguished and delightful piece of goods. He never ceased to be flattered by her regard. But with harsh masculine impartiality he would not minimize to himself the increasing cleft under her chin, nor the deterioration of her once brilliant complexion.

"Well, young man!" Edwin greeted the boy with that insolent familiarity which adults permit themselves to children who are perfect strangers.

"I thought I'd just run in and introduce my latest nephew to you," said Janet quickly, adding, "and then that would be over."

"Oh!" Edwin murmured. "Come into the drawing-room, will you? Maggie's upstairs."

They passed into the drawing-room where a servant in striped print was languidly caressing the glass of a bookcase with a duster. "You can leave this a bit," Edwin said curtly to the girl, who obsequiously acquiesced and fled, forgetting a brush on a chair.

"Sit down, will you?" Edwin urged awkwardly. "And which particular nephew is this? I may tell you he's already raised a great deal of curiosity in the town."

Janet most unusually blushed again.

"Has he?" she replied. "Well, he isn't my nephew at all really, but we pretend he is, don't we, George? It's cosier. This is Master George Cannon."

"Cannon? You don't mean——"

"You remember Mrs. Cannon, don't you? Hilda Lessways? Now, Georgie, come and shake hands with Mr. Clayhanger."

But George would not.

II

"Indeed!" Edwin exclaimed, very feebly. He knew not whether his voice was natural or unnatural. He felt as if he had received a heavy blow with a sandbag over the heart: not a symbolic, but a real physical blow. He might, standing innocent in the street, have been staggeringly assailed by a complete stranger of mild and harmless appearance, who had then passed tranquilly on. Dizzy astonishment held him, to the exclusion of any other sentiment. He might have gasped, foolish and tottering: "Why—what's the meaning of this? What's happened?" He looked at the child uncomprehendingly, idiotically. Little by little—it seemed an age, and was in fact a few seconds—he resumed his faculties, and remembered that in order to keep a conventional self-respect

he must behave in such a manner as to cause Janet to believe that her revelation of the child's identity had in no way disturbed him. To act a friendly indifference seemed to him, then, to be the most important duty in life. And he knew not why.

"I thought," he said in a low voice, and then he began again, "I thought you hadn't been seeing anything of her, of Mrs. Cannon, for a long time now."

The child was climbing on a chair at the window that gave on the garden, absorbed in exploration and discovery, quite ignoring the adults. Either Janet had forgotten him, or she had no hope of controlling him and was trusting to chance that the young wild stag would do nothing too dreadful.

"Well," she admitted, "we haven't." Her constraint recurred. Very evidently she had to be careful about what she said. There were reasons why even to Edwin she would not be frank. "I only brought him down from London yesterday."

Edwin trembled as he put the question—

"Is she here too—Mrs. Cannon?"

Somehow he could only refer to Mrs. Cannon as 'her' and 'she.'

"Oh *no*!" said Janet, in a tone to indicate that there was no possibility of Mrs. Cannon being in Bursley.

He was relieved. Yes, he was glad. He felt that he could not have endured the sensation of her nearness, of her actually being in the next house. Her presence at the Orgreaves' would have made the neighbourhood, the whole town, dangerous. It would have subjected him to the risk of meeting her suddenly at any corner. Nay, he would have been forced to go in cold blood to encounter her. And he knew that he could not have borne to look at her. The constraint of such an interview would have been torture too acute. Strange, that though he was absolutely innocent, though he had done naught but suffer, he should feel like a criminal, should have the criminal's shifting downcast glance!

III

"Auntie!" cried the boy. "Can't I go into this garden? There's a swing there."

"Oh no!" said Janet. "This isn't our garden. We must go home. We only just called in. And big boys who won't shake hands——"

"Yes, yes!" Edwin dreamily stopped her. "Let him go into the garden for a minute if he wants to. You can't run off like that! Come along, my lord."

He saw an opportunity of speaking to her out of the child's hearing. Janet consented, perhaps divining his wish. The child turned and stared deliberately at Edwin, and then plunged forward, too eager to await guidance, towards the conquest of the garden.

Standing silent and awkward in the garden porch, they watched him violently agitating the swing, a contrivance erected by a good-natured Uncle Edwin for the diversion of Clara's offspring.

"How old is he?" Edwin demanded, for the sake of saying something.

"About nine," said Janet.

"He doesn't look it."

"No, but he talks it—sometimes."

George did not in fact look his age. He was slight and small, and he seemed to have no bones—nothing but articulations that functioned with equal ease in all possible directions. His skin was pale and unhealthy. His eyes had an expression of fatigue, or he might have been ophthalmic. He spoke loudly, his gestures were brusque, and his life was apparently made up of a series of intense, absolute absorptions. The general effect of his personality upon Edwin was not quite agreeable, and Edwin's conclusion was that George, in addition to being spoiled, was a profound and rather irritating egoist by nature.

"By the way," he murmured, "what's *Mr. Cannon*?"

"Oh!" said Janet, hesitating, with emotion, "she's a widow."

He felt sick. Janet might have been a doctor who had informed him that he was suffering from an unexpected disease, and that an operation severe and perilous lay in front of him. The impartial observer in him asked somewhat disdainfully why he should allow himself to be deranged in this physical manner, and he could only reply feebly and very meekly that he did not know. He felt sick.

Suddenly he said to himself, making a discovery—

"Of course she won't come to Bursley. She'd be ashamed to meet me."

"How long?" he demanded of Janet.

"It was last year, I think," said Janet, with emotion increased, her voice heavy with the load of its sympathy. When he first knew Janet an extraordinary quick generous concern for others had been one of her chief characteristics. But of late years, though her deep universal kindness had not changed, she seemed to have hardened somewhat on the surface. Now he found again the earlier Janet.

"You never told me."

"The truth is, we didn't know," Janet said, and without giving Edwin time to put another question, she continued: "The poor thing's had a great deal of trouble, a very great deal. George's health, now! The sea air doesn't suit him. And Hilda couldn't possibly leave Brighton."

"Oh! She's still at Brighton?"

"Yes."

"Let me see—she used to be at—what was it?—Preston Street?"

Janet glanced at him with interest: "What a memory you've got! Why, it's ten years since she was here!"

"Nearly!" said Edwin. "It just happened to stick in my mind. You remember she came down to the shop to ask me about trains and things the day she left."

"Did she?" Janet exclaimed, raising her eyebrows.

Edwin had been suspecting that possibly Hilda had given some hint to Janet as to the nature of her relations with him. He now ceased to suspect that. He grew easier. He gathered up the reins again, though in a rather limp hand.

"Why is she so bound to stay in Brighton?" he inquired with affected boldness.

"She's got a boarding-house."

"I see. Well, it's a good thing she has a private income of her own."

"That's just the point," said Janet sadly. "We very much doubt if she has any private income any longer."

Edwin waited for further details, but Janet seemed to speak unwilling. She would follow him, but she would not lead.

IV

Behind them he could hear the stir of Mrs. Hamps's departure. She and Maggie were coming down the stairs. Guessing not the dramatic arrival of Janet Orgreave and the mysterious nephew, Mrs. Hamps, having peeped into the empty dining-room, said: "I suppose the dear boy has gone," and forthwith went herself. Edwin smiled cruelly at the thought of what her joy would have been actually to inspect the mysterious nephew at close quarters, and to learn the strange suspicious truth that he was not a nephew after all.

"Auntie!" yelled the boy across the garden.

"Come along, we must go now," Janet retorted.

"No! I want you to swing me. Make me swing very high."

"George!"

"Let him swing a bit," said Edwin. "I'll go and swing him." And calling loud to the boy: "I'll come and swing you."

"He's dreadfully spoiled," Janet protested. "You'll make him worse."

"I don't care," said Edwin carelessly.

He seemed to understand better than he had ever done with Clara's litter, how and why parents came to spoil their children. It was not because they feared a struggle of wills; but because of the unreasoning instinctive pleasure to be derived from the conferring of pleasure, especially when the pleasure thus conferred might involve doubtful consequences. He had not cared for the boy, did not care for him. In theory he had the bachelor's factitious horror of a spoiled child. Nevertheless he would now support the boy against Janet. His instinct said: "He wants something. I can give it him. Let him have it. Never mind consequences. He shall have it."

He crossed the damp grass, and felt the breeze and the sun. The sky was a moving medley of Chinese white and Prussian blue, that harmonized admirably with the Indian red architecture which framed it on all sides. The high trees in the garden of the Orgreaves were turning to rich yellows and browns, and dead leaves slanted slowly down from their summits, a few reaching even the Clayhanger garden, speckling its evergreen with ochre. On the other side of the west wall

traps and carts rattled and rumbled and creaked along Trafalgar Road.

The child had stopped swinging, and greeted him with a most heavenly persuasive grateful smile. A different child ! A sudden angel, with delicate distinguished gestures ! . . . A wondrous screwing-up of the eyes in the sun ! Weak eyes, perhaps ! The thick eyebrows recalled Hilda's. Possibly he had Hilda's look ! Or was that fancy ? Edwin was sure that he would never have guessed George's parentage.

"Now !" he warned. "Hold tight." And, going behind the boy, he strongly clasped his slim little waist in its blue sailor-cloth, and sent the whole affair—swing-seat and boy and all—flying to the skies. And the boy shrieked in the violence of his ecstasy, and his cap fell on the grass. Edwin worked hard without relaxing.

"Go on ! Go on !" the boy shriekingly commanded.

And amid these violent efforts and brusque delicious physical contacts, Edwin was calmly penetrated and saturated by the mystic effluence that is disengaged from young children. He had seen his father dead, and had thought : "Here is the most majestic and impressive enigma that the earth can show !" But the child George—aged nine and seeming more like seven—offered an enigma surpassing in solemnity that of death. This was Hilda's. This was hers, who had left him a virgin. With a singular thrilled impassivity he imagined, not bitterly, the history of Hilda. She who was his by word and by kiss, had given her mortal frame to the unknown Cannon—yielded it. She had conceived. At some moment when he, Edwin, was alive and suffering, she had conceived. She had ceased to be a virgin. Quickly, with an astounding quickness—for was not George nine years old ?—she had passed from virginity to motherhood. And he imagined all that too ; all of it ; clearly. And here, swinging and shrieking, exerting the powerful and unique charm of infancy, was the miraculous sequel ! Another individuality ; a new being ; definitely formed, with character and volition of its own ; unlike any other individuality in the universe ! Something fresh ! Something unimaginably created ! A phenomenon absolutely original of the pride and the tragedy of life ! George !

Yesterday she was a virgin, and to-day there was this !

And this might have been his, ought to have been his ! Yes, he thrilled secretly amid all those pushings and joltings ! The mystery obsessed him. He had no rancour against Hilda. He was incapable of rancour, except a kind of wilful, fostered rancour in trifles. Thus he never forgave the inventor of Saturday afternoon Bible-classes. But rancour against Hilda——! No ! Her act had been above rancour ; like an act of Heaven. And she existed yet. On a spot of the earth's surface entitled Brighton, which he could locate upon a map, she existed : a widow, in difficulty, keeping a boarding-house. She ate, slept, struggled ; she brushed her hair. He could see her brushing her hair. And she was thirty-four——was it ? The wonder of the world amazed and shook him. And it appeared to him that his career was more romantic than ever.

George with dangerous abruptness wriggled his legs downwards and slipped off the seat of the swing, not waiting for Edwin to stop it. He rolled on the grass and jumped up in haste. He had had enough.

“ Well, want any more ? ” Edwin asked, breathing hard.

The child made a shy, negative sigh, twisting his tousled head down into his right shoulder. After all he was not really impudent, brazen. He could show a delicious timidity. Edwin decided that he was an enchanting child. He wanted to talk to him, but he could not think of anything natural and reasonable to say by way of opening.

“ You haven't told me your name, you know,” he began at length. “ How do I know what your name is ? George, yes—but George what ? George is nothing by itself, I know ten million Georges.”

The child smiled.

“ George Edwin Cannon,” he replied shyly.

v

“ Now, George ! ” came Janet's voice, more firmly than before. After all, she meant in the end to be obeyed. She was learning her business as aunt to this new and difficult nephew ; but learn it she would, and thoroughly !

“ Come on ! ” Edwin counselled the boy.

They went together to the house. Maggie had found Janet,

and the two were conversing. Soon afterwards aunt and nephew departed.

"How very odd!" murmured Maggie, with an unusual intonation, in the hall, as Edwin was putting on his hat to return to the shop. But whether she was speaking to herself or to him, he knew not.

"What?" he asked gruffly.

"Well," she said, "isn't it!"

She was more like Auntie Hamps, more like Clara, than herself in that moment. He resented the suspicious implications of her tone. He was about to give her one of his rude, curt rejoinders, but happily he remembered in time that scarce half an hour earlier he had turned over a new leaf; so he kept silence. He walked down to the shop in a deep dream.

CHAPTER III

ADVENTURE

I

IT was when Edwin fairly reached the platform at Victoria Station and saw the grandiose express waiting its own moment to start, that the strange irrational quality of his journey first fully impressed him and frightened him—so much that he was almost ready to walk out of the station again. To come gradually into London from the North, to pass from the Manchester train half-full of Midlanders through Bloomsbury into the preoccupied, struggling, and untidy Strand—this gave no shock, typified nothing definite. But, having spent a night in London, deliberately to leave it for the South, where he had never been, of which he was entirely ignorant,—that was like an explicit self-committal, like turning the back on the last recognizable landmark in an ill-considered voyage of pure adventure.

The very character of Victoria Station and of this express was different from that of any other station and express in his experience. It was unstrenuous, soft ; it had none of the busy harshness of the Midlands ; it spoke of pleasure, relaxation, of spending free from all worry and humiliation of getting. Everybody who came towards this train came with an assured air of wealth and of dominion. Everybody was well dressed ; many if not most of the women were in furs ; some had expensive and delicate dogs ; some had pale, elegant footmen, being too august even to speak to porters. All the luggage was luxurious ; handbags could be seen that were worth fifteen or twenty pounds apiece. There was no question of first, second, or third class ; there was no class at all on this train. Edwin had the apologetic air of the provincial who is determined to be as good as anybody else. When he sat down in the vast interior of one of those gilded vehicles he

could not dismiss from his face the consciousness that he was an intruder, that he did not belong to that world. He was ashamed of his hand-baggage, and his gesture in tipping the porter lacked carelessness. Of course he pretended a frowning, absorbed interest in a newspaper—but the very newspaper was strange; he guessed not that unless he glanced first at the penultimate column of page one thereof he convicted himself of not knowing his way about.

He could not think consecutively, not even of his adventure. His brain was in a maze of anarchy. But at frequent intervals recurred the query: "What the devil am I up to?" And he would uneasily smile to himself. When the train rolled with all its majesty out of the station and across the Thames, he said to himself, fearful, "Well, I've done it now!"

II

On the Thursday he had told Maggie, with affected casualness, that on the Friday he might have to go to London, about a new machine. Sheer invention! Fortunately Maggie had been well drilled by her father in the manner proper to women in accepting announcements connected with 'business.' And Edwin was just as laconic and mysterious as Darius had been about 'business.' It was a word that ended arguments, or prevented them. On the Friday he had said that he should go in the afternoon. On being asked whether he should return on the Saturday, he had replied that he did not know, but that he would telegraph. Whereupon Maggie had said that if he stayed away for the week-end she should probably have all the children up for dinner and tea. At the shop, "Stifford," he had said, "I suppose you don't happen to know a good hotel in Brighton? I might run down there for the week-end if I don't come back to-morrow. But you needn't say anything." "No, sir," Stifford had discreetly concurred in this suggestion. "They say there's really only one hotel in Brighton, sir—the Royal Sussex. But I've never been there." Edwin had replied: "Not the Metropole, then?" "Oh no, sir!" Stifford had become a great and wonderful man, and Edwin's constant fear was that he might lose this indispensable prop to his business. For Stifford, having done a little irregular commercial travelling in Staffordshire and the

neighbouring counties, had been seised of the romance of travelling; he frequented the society of real commercial travellers, and was gradually becoming a marvellous encyclopædia of information about hotels, routes, and topography.

Edwin having been to the Bank himself, instead of sending Stifford, had departed with the minimum of ostentation. He had in fact crept away. Since the visit of Janet and the child he had not seen either of them again, nor had he mentioned the child to anybody at all.

III

When, in an astounding short space of time, he stood in the King's Road at Brighton, it seemed to him that he was in a dream; that he was not really at Brighton, that town which for so many years had been to him naught but a romantic name. Had his adventurousness, his foolhardiness, indeed carried him so far? As for Brighton, it corresponded with no dream. It was vaster than any imagining of it. Edwin had only seen the pleasure cities of the poor and of the middling, such as Blackpool and Llandudno. He had not conceived what wealth would do when it organized itself for the purposes of distraction. The train had prepared him to a certain extent, but not sufficiently. He suddenly saw Brighton in its autumnal pride, Brighton beginning one of its fine weekends, and he had to admit that the number of rich and idle people in the world surpassed his provincial notions. For miles westwards and miles eastwards, against a formidable background of high, yellow and brown architecture, persons the luxuriousness of any one of whom would have drawn remarks in Bursley, walked or drove or rode in thronging multitudes. Edwin could comprehend lolling by the sea in August, but in late October it seemed unnatural, fantastic. The air was full of the trot of glossy horses and the rattle of bits and the roll of swift wheels, and the fall of elegant soles on endless clean pavements; it was full of the consciousness of being correct and successful. Many of the faces were monstrously ugly, most were dissatisfied and querulous; but they were triumphant. Even the pale beings in enlarged perambulators, pulled solemnly to and fro by their aged fellow-beings, were triumphant. The scared, the maimed,

yes, and the able-bodied blind trusting to the arms of friends, were triumphant. And the enormous policemen, respectfully bland, confident in the system which had chosen them and fattened them, gave as it were to the scene an official benediction.

The bricks and stucco which fronted the sea on the long embanked promenade never sank lower than a four-storey boarding-house, and were continually rising to the height of some gilt-lettered hotel, and at intervals rose sheer into the skies—six, eight, ten stories—where a hotel, admittedly the grandest on any shore of ocean sent terra-cotta chimneys to lose themselves amid the pearly clouds. Nearly every building was a lodgment waiting for the rich, and nearly every great bow-window, out of tens of thousands of bow-windows bulging forward in an effort to miss no least glimpse of the full prospect, exhibited the apparatus and the menials of gourmandize. And the eye, following the interminable irregular horizontal lines of architecture, was foiled in the far distances, and, still farther off, after a break of indistinguishable brown, it would catch again the receding run of roofs, simplified by atmosphere into featureless rectangles of grey against sapphire or rose. There were two piers that strode and sprawled into the sea, and these also were laden with correctness and with domination. And, between the two, men were walking miraculously on the sea to build a third, that should stride farther and deeper than the others.

IV

Amid the crowd, stamping, and tapping his way monotonously along with the assured obstinacy of a mendicant experienced and hardened, came a shabby man bearing on his breast a large label with these words: "Blind through boy throwing mortar. Discharged from four hospitals. Incurable." Edwin's heart seemed to be constricted. He thought of the ragged snarling touts who had fawned to him at the station, and of the creatures locked in the cellars whence came beautiful odours of confectionery and soup through the pavement gratings, and of the slatternly women who kept thrusting flowers under his nose, and the half-clad infants who skimmed before the wind yelling the names of newspapers. All was

not triumph ! Where triumph was, there also must be the conquered.

She was there, she too ! Somewhere, close to him. He recalled the exact tone of Janet's voice as she had said : " The poor thing's had a great deal of trouble." A widow, trying to run a boarding-house and not succeeding ! Why, there were hundreds upon hundreds of boarding-houses, all large, all imposing, all busy at the end of October ! Where was hers hidden away, her pathetic little boarding-house ? Preston Street ! He knew not where Preston Street was, and he had purposely refrained from inquiring. But he might encounter it at any moment. He was afraid to look too closely at the street-signs as he passed them ; afraid !

" What am I doing here ? " he asked himself curiously, and sometimes pettishly. " What's my object ? Where's the sense of it ? I'm nothing but a damned fool. I've got no plan. I don't know what I'm going to do." It was true. He had no plan, and he did not know what he was going to do. What he did most intimately know was that the idea of her nearness made him tremble.

" I'd much better go back at once," he said.

He walked miles, until he came to immense and silent squares of huge palatial houses, and wide transversal avenues running far up into the land and into the dusk. In these vast avenues and across these vast squares infrequent carriages sped like mechanical toys guided by mannikins. The sound of the sea waxed. And then he saw the twinkle of lights, and then fire ran slowly along the promenade : until the whole map of it was drawn out in flame ; and he perceived that though he had walked a very long way, the high rampart of houses continued still interminably beyond him. He turned. He was tired. His face caught the full strength of the rising wind. Foam gleamed on the rising tide. In the profound violet sky to the east stars shone and were wiped out, in fields ; but to the west, silver tarried. He had not seen Preston Street, and it was too dark now to decipher the signs. He was glad. He went on and on, with rapidly increasing fatigue, disgust, impatience. The thronging multitudes had almost disappeared ; but many illuminated vehicles were flitting to and fro, and the shops were brilliant. He was so exhausted

by the pavements that he could scarcely walk. And Brighton became for him the most sorrowful city on earth.

"What am I doing here?" he asked himself savagely. However, by dint of sticking doggedly to it he did in the end reach the hotel.

v

After dinner, and wine, both of which, by their surprising and indeed unique excellence, fostered the prestige of Stifford as an authority upon hotels, Edwin was conscious of new strength and cheerfulness. He left the crowded and rose-lit dining-room early, because he was not at ease amid its ceremoniousness of attire and of service, and went into the Turkey-carpeted hall, whose porter suddenly sprang into propitiatory life on seeing him. He produced a cigarette, and with passionate haste the porter produced a match, and by his method of holding the flame to the cigarette, deferential and yet firm, proved that his young existence had not been wasted in idleness. When the cigarette was alight, the porter surveyed his work with a pleased smile.

"Another rare storm blowing up, sir," said the porter.

"Yes," said Edwin. "It's been giving the window of my room a fine shake."

The porter glanced at the clock. "High tide in half an hour, sir,"

"I think I'll go out and have a look at it," said Edwin.

"Yes, sir."

"By the way," Edwin added, "I suppose you haven't got a map of Brighton?"

"Certainly, sir," said the porter, and with a rebirth of passion began to search among the pile of time-tables and other documents on a table behind him.

Edwin wished he had not asked for the map. He had not meant to ask for it. The words had said themselves. He gazed unseeing at the map for a few instants.

"What particular street did you want, sir?" the porter murmured.

In deciding how to answer, it seemed to Edwin that he was deciding the hazard of his life.

"Preston Street."

"Oh! Preston Street!" the porter repeated in a relieved tone, as if assuring Edwin that there was nothing very esoteric about Preston Street. "It's just beyond the Metropole. You know Regency Square. Well, it's the next street after that. There's a club at the corner."

In the afternoon, then, Edwin must have walked across the end of Preston Street twice. This thought made him tremble, as at the perception of a danger past but unperceived at the moment.

The porter gave his whole soul to the putting of Edwin's overcoat on Edwin's back; he offered the hat with an obeisance; and having ushered Edwin into the night so that the illustrious guest might view the storm, he turned with a sudden new mysterious supply of zeal to other guests who were now emerging from the dining-room.

VI

The hotel fronted north on an old sheltered square where no storm raged, but simultaneously with Edwin's first glimpse of the sea the wind struck him a tremendous blow, and continued to strike. He had the peculiar grim joy of the Midlander and Northerner in defying an element. All the lamps of the promenade were insecurely flickering. Grouped opposite a small jetty was a crowd of sightseers. The dim extremity of the jetty was wreathed in spray, and the waves ran along its side, making curved lines on the masonry like curved lines of a rope shaken from one end. The wet floor of the jetty shone like a mirror. Edwin approached the crowd, and, peeping over black shoulders, could see down into the hollow of the corner between the jetty and the sea-wall, where boys on the steps dared the spent waves, amid jeering laughter. The crowd had the air of being a family intimately united. Farther on was another similar crowd, near an irregular high fountain of spray that glittered in the dark. On the beach below, at vague distances were curious rows of apparently tiny people silhouetted like the edge of a black saw against an excessive whiteness. This whiteness was the sheet of foam that the sea made. It stretched everywhere, until the eye lost it seawards. Edwin descended to the beach, adding another tooth to the saw. The tide ran up absolutely white in wide chords of a

circle, and then, to the raw noise of disturbed shingle, the chord vanished ; and in a moment was re-created. This play went on endlessly, hypnotizing the spectators who, beaten by the wind and deafened by sound, stared and stared, safe, at the mysterious and menacing world of spray and foam and darkness. Before, was the open malignant sea. Close behind, on their eminence, the hotels rose in vast cubes of yellow light, moveless, secure, strangely confident that nothing sinister could happen to them.

Edwin was aware of emotion. The feel of his overcoat-collar upturned against the chin was friendly to him amid that onset of the pathos of the human world. He climbed back to the promenade. Always at the bottom of his mind, the foundation of all the shifting structures in his mind, was the consciousness of his exact geographical relation to Preston Street. He walked westwards along the promenade. " Why am I doing this ? " he asked himself again and again. " Why don't I go home ? I must be mad to be doing this." Still his legs carried him on, past lamp-post after lamp-post of the wind-driven promenade, now almost deserted. And presently the high lighted windows of the grandest hotels were to be seen, cut like square holes in the sky ; and then the pier, which had flung a string of lanterns over the waves into the storm ; and opposite the pier a dark empty space and a rectangle of gas-lamps : Regency Square. He crossed over, and passed up the Square, and out of it by a tiny side-street, at hazard, and lo ! he was in Preston Street. He went hot and cold.

VII

Well, and what then ? Preston Street was dark and lonely. The wind charged furiously through it, panting towards the downs. He was in Preston Street, but what could he do ? She was behind the black walls of one of those houses. But what then ? Could he knock at the door in the night and say : " I've come. I don't know why " ?

He said : " I shall walk up and down this street once, and then I shall go back to the hotel. That's the only thing to do. I've gone off my head, that's what's the matter with me ! I ought to have written to her. Why in the name of God

didn't I begin by writing to her? . . . Of course I might write to her from the hotel . . . send the letter by messenger to-night . . . or early to-morrow. Yes, that's what I'll do."

He set himself to make the perambulation of the street. Many of the numbers were painted on the fanlights over the doors and showed plain against illumination. Suddenly he saw the large figures '59.' He was profoundly stirred. He had said that the matter with him was that he had gone off his head; but now, staring at that number on the opposite side of the street, he really did not know what was the matter with him. He might have been dying. The front of the house was dark save for the fanlight. He crossed over and peered down into the area and at the black door. A brass plate: "Cannon's Boarding-House," he could read. He perspired. It seemed to him that he could see her within the house, mysteriously moving at her feminine tasks. Or did she lie in bed? He had come from Bursley to London, from London to Brighton, and now he had found her portal; it existed. The adventure seemed incredible in its result. Enough for the present! He could stand no more. He walked away, meaning not to return.

When he returned, five minutes later, the fanlight was dark. Had *she*, in the meantime, come into the hall of the house and extinguished the gas? Strange, that all lights should be out in a boarding establishment before ten o'clock! He stood hesitant quite near the house, holding himself against the wind. Then the door opened a little, as it were stealthily, and a hand and arm crept out and with a cloth polished the face of the brass plate. He thought, in his excited fancy, that it was her hand and arm. Within, he seemed to distinguish a dim figure. He did not move; could not. The door opened wider, and the figure stood revealed, a woman's. Surely it was she! She gazed at him suspiciously, duster in hand.

"What are you standing there for?" she questioned inimically. "We've had enough of loiterers in this street. Please go away."

She took him for a knave expectant of some chance to maraud. She was not fearful, however. It was she. It was her voice.

CHAPTER IV IN PRESTON STREET

I

HE said, "I happened to be in Brighton, so I thought I'd just call, and—I thought I'd just call." She stared at him, frowning, in the dim diffused light of the street.

"I've been seeing your little boy," he said. "I thought perhaps as I was here you'd like to know how he was getting on."

"Why," she exclaimed, with seeming bitterness, "you've grown a beard!"

"Yes," he admitted foolishly, apologetically.

"We can't stand here in this wind," she said, angry with the wind, which was indeed blowing her hair about, and her skirts and her duster.

She did not in words invite him to enter, but she held the door more widely open and drew back for him to pass. He went in. She closed the door with a bang and rattle of large old-fashioned latches, locks, and chains, and the storm was excluded. They were in the dark of the hall. "Wait till I put my hand on the matches," she said. Then she struck a match, which revealed a common oil-lamp, with a reservoir of yellow glass and a paper shade. She raised the chimney and lit the lamp, and regulated the wick.

Edwin kept silence. The terrible constraint which had half paralysed him when Janet first mentioned Hilda, seized him again. He stood near the woman who without a word of explanation or regret had jilted, outraged, and ruined him ten years before; this was their first meeting after their kisses in his father's shop. And yet she was not on her knees, nor in tears, nor stammering an appeal for forgiveness. It was rather he who was apologetic, who sought excuses. He felt

somehow like a criminal, or at least like one who commits an enormous indiscretion.

The harsh curves of her hair were the same. Her thick eyebrows were the same. Her blazing glance was the same. Her intensely clear intonation was the same. But she was a profoundly changed woman. Even in his extreme perturbation he could be sure of that. As, bending under the lampshade to arrange the wick, she exposed her features to the bright light, Edwin saw a face marred by anxiety and grief and time, the face of a mature woman, with no lingering pretension to girlishness. She was thirty-four, and she looked older than Maggie, and much older than Janet. She was embittered. Her black dress was shabby and untidy, her finger-nails irregular, discoloured, and damaged. The aspect of her pained Edwin acutely. It seemed to him a poignant shame that time and sorrow and misfortune could not pass over a young girl's face and leave no mark. When he recalled what she had been, comparing the woman with the delicious wistful freshness of the girl that lived unaltered in his memory, he was obliged to clear his throat. The contrast was too pathetic to be dwelt on. Only with the woman before him did he fully appreciate the exquisite innocent simplicity of the girl. In the day of his passion Hilda had not seemed to him very young, very simple, very wistful. On the contrary she had seemed to have much of the knowledge and the temper of a woman.

Having at length subjugated the wick, she straightened her back, with a gesture that he knew, and for one instant she was a girl again.

II

"Will you come this way?" she said coldly, holding the lamp in front of her, and opening a door.

At the same moment another door opened at the far end of the hall; there was a heavy footstep; a great hand and arm showed, and then Edwin had a glimpse of a man's head and shoulders emerging from an oblong flickering firelight.

Hilda paused. "All right," she called to the man, who at once disappeared, shutting the door and leaving darkness

where he had been. The large shadows cast by Hilda's lamp now had the gaunt hall to themselves again.

"Don't be alarmed," she laughed harshly. "It's only the broker's man."

Edwin was tongue-tied. If Hilda were joking, what answer could be made to such a pleasantry in such a situation? And if she were speaking the truth, if the bailiffs really were in possession . . . ! His life seemed to him once again astoundingly romantic. He had loved this woman, conquered her. And now she was a mere acquaintance, and he was following her stiffly into the recesses of a strange and sinister abode peopled by mysterious men. Was this a Brighton boarding-house? It resembled nothing reputable in his experience. All was incomprehensible.

The room into which she led him was evidently the dining-room. Not spacious, perhaps not quite so large as his own dining-room, it was nearly filled by one long bare table. Eight or ten monotonous chairs were ranged round the grey walls. In the embrasure of the window was a wicker stand with a withered plant on its summit, and at the other end of the room a walnut sideboard in the most horrible taste. The mantelpiece was draped with dark knotted and rosetted cloth; within the fender stood a small paper screen. The walls were hung with ancient and with fairly modern engravings, some big, others little, some coloured, others in black-and-white, but all distressing in their fatuous ugliness. The ceiling seemed black. The whole room fulfilled pretty accurately the scornful scrupulous housewife's notion of a lodging-house interior. It was suspect. And in Edwin there was a good deal of the housewife. He was appalled. Obviously the house was small—he had known that from the outside—and the entire enterprise insignificant. This establishment was not in the King's Road, nor on the Marine Parade, nor at Hove; no doubt hundreds of such little places existed precariously in a vast town like Brighton. Widows, of course, were often in straits. And Janet had told him. . . . Nevertheless he was appalled, and completely at a loss to reconcile Hilda with her environment. And then—'the broker's man'!

At her bidding he sat down, in his overcoat, with his hat

insecure on his knee, and observed, under the lamp, the dust on the surface of the long table. Hilda seated herself opposite, so that the lamp was between them, hiding him from her by its circle of light. He wondered what Maggie would have thought, and what Clara would have said, could they have seen him in that obscurity.

III

"So you've seen my boy?" she began, with no softening of tone.

"Yes, Janet Orgreave brought him in one morning—the other day. He didn't seem to me to be so ill as all that."

"Ill!" she exclaimed. "He certainly wasn't ill when he left here. But he had been. And the doctor said that this air didn't suit him—it never had suited him. It doesn't suit some folks, you know—people can say what they like."

"Anyhow, he's a lively piece—no mistake about that!"

"When he's well, he's very well," said George's mother. "But he's up and down in a minute. And on the whole he's been on the poorly side."

He noticed that, though there was no relapse from the correctness of her accent, she was using just such phrases as she might have used had she never quitted her native Turnhill. He looked round the lamp at her furtively, and seemed to see in her shadowed face a particular local quality of sincerity and downrightness that appealed strongly to his admiration. (Yet ten years earlier he had considered her markedly foreign to the Five Towns.) That this quality should have survived in her was a proof to him that she was a woman unique. Unique she had been, and unique she still remained. He did not know that he had long ago lost for ever the power of seeing her with a normal vision. He imagined in his simplicity, which disguised itself as chill critical impartiality, that he was adding her up with clear-sighted shrewdness. . . . And then she was a mother! That meant a mysterious, a mystic perfecting! For him, it was as if among all women she alone had been a mother—so special was his view of the influence of motherhood upon her. He drew together all the beauty of an experience almost universal, transcendentalized it, and centred it on one being. And he was disturbed, baffled,

agitated by the effect of the secret workings of his own unsuspected emotion. He was made sad, and sadder. He wanted to right wrongs, to efface from hearts the memory of grief, to create bliss ; and he knew that this could never be done. He now saw Hilda exclusively as a victim, whose misfortunes were innumerable. Imagine this creature, with her passion for Victor Hugo, obliged by circumstances to polish a brass door-plate surreptitiously at night ! Imagine her solitary in the awful house—with the broker's man ! Imagine her forced to separate herself from her child ! Imagine the succession of disasters that had soured her and transformed seriousness into harshness and acidity ! . . . And within that envelope, what a soul must be burning !

" And when he begins to grow—he's scarcely *begun* to grow yet," Hilda continued about her offspring, " then he will need all his strength ! "

" Yes, he will," Edwin concurred heartily.

He wanted to ask her, " Why did you call him Edwin for his second name ? Was it his father's name, or your father's, or did *you* insist on it yourself, because——? " But he could not ask. He could ask nothing. He could not even ask why she had jilted him without a word. He knew naught, and evidently she was determined to give no information. She might at any rate have explained how she had come to meet Janet, and under what circumstances Janet had taken possession of the child. All was a mystery. Her face, when he avoided the lamp, shone in the midst of a huge dark cloud of impenetrable mystery. She was too proud to reveal anything whatever. The grand pride in her forbade her even to excuse her conduct to himself. A terrific woman !

IV

Silence fell. His constraint was excruciating. She, too, was nervous, tapping the table and creaking her chair. He could not speak.

" Shall you be going back to Bursley soon ? " she demanded. In her voice was desperation.

" Oh yes ! " he said, thankfully eager to follow up any subject. " On Monday, I expect."

" I wonder if you'd mind giving Janet a little parcel from me

—some things of George's? I meant to send it by post, but if you——"

"Of course! With pleasure!" He seemed to implore her.

"It's quite small," she said, rising and going to the side-board, on which lay a little brown-paper parcel.

His eye followed her. She picked up the parcel, glanced at it, and offered it to him.

"I'll take it across on Monday night," he said fervently.

"Thanks."

She remained standing; he got up.

"No message or anything?" he suggested.

"Oh!" she said coldly, "I write, you know."

"Well——" He made the gesture of departing. There was no alternative.

"We're having very rough weather, aren't we?" she said, with careless conventionality, as she took the lamp.

In the hall, when she held out her hand, he wanted tremendously to squeeze it, to give her through his hand the message of sympathy which his tongue, intimidated by her manner, dared not give. But his hand also refused to obey him. The clasp was strictly ceremonious. As she was drawing the heavy latch of the door he forced himself to say, "I'm in Brighton sometimes, off and on. Now I know where you are, I must look you up."

She made no answer. She merely said good night as he passed out into the street and the wind. The door banged.

V

Edwin took a long breath. He had seen her! Yes, but the interview had been worse than his worst expectations. He had surpassed himself in futility, in fatuous lack of enterprise. He had behaved like a schoolboy. Now, as he plunged up the street with the wind, he could devise easily a dozen ways of animating and guiding and controlling the interview so that, even if sad, its sadness might have been agreeable. The interview had been hell, ineffable torture, a perfect crime of clumsiness. It had resulted in nothing. (Except, of course, that he had seen her—that fact was indisputable.) He

blamed himself. He cursed himself with really extraordinary savageness.

"Why did I go near her?" he demanded. "Why couldn't I keep away? I've simply made myself look a blasted fool! Creeping and crawling round her! . . . After all, she *did* throw me over! And now she asks me to take a parcel to her confounded kid! The whole thing's ridiculous! And what's going to happen to her in that hole? I don't suppose she's got the least notion of looking after herself. Impossible—the whole thing! If anybody had told me that I should—that she'd——" Half of which talk was simple bluster. The parcel was bobbing on its loop against his side.

When he reached the top of the street he discovered that he had been going up it instead of down it. "What am I thinking of?" he grumbled impatiently. However, he would not turn back. He ventured forward, climbing into latitudes whose geography was strange to him, and scarcely seeing a single fellow-wanderer beneath the gas-lamps. Presently, after a steep hill, he came to a churchyard, and then he redescended, and at last tumbled into a street alive with people who had emerged from a theatre, laughing, lighting cigarettes, linking arms. Their existence seemed shallow, purposeless, infantile, compared to his. He felt himself superior to them. What did they know about life? He would not change with any of them.

Recognizing the label on an omnibus, he followed its direction and arrived almost immediately in the vast square which contained his hotel, and which was illuminated by the brilliant façades of several hotels. The doors of the Royal Sussex were locked, because eleven o'clock had struck. He could not account for the period of nearly three hours which had passed since he left the hotel. The zealous porter, observing his shadow through the bars, had sprung to unfasten the door before he could ring.

VI

Within the hotel reigned gaiety, wine, and the dance. Small tables had been placed in the hall, and at these sat bald-headed men, smoking cigars and sharing champagne with ladies of every age. A white carpet had been laid in

the large smoking-room, and through the curtained archway that separated it from the hall, Edwin could see couples revolving in obedience to the music of a piano and a violin. One of the Royal Sussex's Saturday Cinderellas was in progress. The self-satisfied gestures of men inspecting their cigars or lifting glasses, of simpering women glancing on the sly at their jewels, and of youths pulling straight their white waistcoats as they strolled about with the air of Don Juans, invigorated his contempt for the average existence. The tinkle of the music appeared exquisitely tedious in its superficiality. He could not remain in the hall because of the incorrectness of his attire, and the staircase was blocked, to a timid man, by elegant couples apparently engaged in the act of flirtation. He turned, through a group of attendant waiters, into the passage leading to the small smoking-room which adjoined the discreetly situated bar. This smoking-room, like a club, warm and bright, was empty, but in passing he had caught sight of two mutually affectionate dandies drinking at the splendid mahogany of the bar. He lit a cigarette. Seated in the smoking-room he could hear their conversation; he was forced to hear it.

"I'm really a very quiet man, old chap, *very* quiet," said one, with a wavering drawl, "but when they get at me—— I was at the Club at one o'clock. I wasn't drunk, but I had a top on."

"You were just gay and cheerful," the other flatteringly and soothingly suggested, in an exactly similar wavering drawl.

"Yes. I felt as if I wanted to go out somewhere and have another drink. So I went to Willis's Rooms. I was in evening-dress. You know you have to get a domino for those things. Then, of course, you're a mark at once. I also got a nose. A girl snatched it off me. I told her what I thought of *her*, and I got another nose. Then five fellows tried to snatch my domino off me. Then I *did* get angry. I landed out with my right at the nearest chap—right on his heart. Not his face. His heart. I lowered him. He asked me afterwards, 'Was that your right?' 'Yes,' I said, 'and my left's worse!' I couldn't use my left because they were holding it. You see? You *see*?"

"Yes," said the other impatiently, and suddenly cantankerous. "I see that all right! Damned awful rot those Willis's Rooms affairs are getting, if you ask me!"

"Asses!" Edwin exploded within himself. "Idiots!" He could not tolerate their crassness. He had a hot prejudice against them because they were not as near the core of life as he was himself. It appeared to him that most people died without having lived. Willis's Rooms! Girls! Nose! Heart! . . . Asses!

He surged again out of the small room, desolating the bar with one scornful glance as he went by. He braved the staircase, leaving those scenes of drivelling festivity. In his bedroom, with the wind crashing against the window, he regarded meditatively the parcel. After all, if she had meant to have nothing to do with him, she would not have charged him with the parcel. The parcel was a solid fact. The more he thought about it, the more significant a fact it seemed to him. His ears sang with the vibrating intensity of his secret existence, but from the wild confusion of his heart he could disentangle no constant idea.

CHAPTER V

THE BULLY

I

THE next morning he was up early, preternaturally awake. When he descended the waiters were waiting for him, and the zealous porter stood ready to offer him a Sunday paper, just as though in the night they had refreshed themselves magically, without going to bed. No sign nor relic of the Cinderella remained. He breakfasted in an absent mind, and then went idly into the lounge, a room with one immense circular window, giving on the Square. Rain was falling heavily. Already from the porter, and in the very mien of the waiters, he had learnt that the Brighton Sunday was ruined. He left the window. On a round table in the middle of the room were ranged, with religious regularity, all the most esoteric examples of periodical literature in our language, from "The Iron-Trades Review" to "The Animals' Guardian." With one careless movement he destroyed the balanced perfection of a labour into which some menial had put his soul, and then dropped into a gigantic easy chair near the fire, whose thin flames were just rising through the interstices of great black lumps of coal.

The housekeeper, stiff with embroidered silk, swam majestically into the lounge, bowed with a certain frigid and deferential surprise to the early guest, and proceeded to an inquiry into dust. In a moment she called, sharp and low—

"Arthur!"

And a page ran eagerly in, to whom, in the difficult corners of upholstery and of sculptured wood, she pointed out his sins of omission, lashing him with a restrained voice that Edwin could scarcely hear. Passing her hand carelessly along the beading of a door panel and then examining her fingers, she departed. The page fetched a duster.

"I see why this hotel has such a name," said Edwin to himself. And suddenly the image of Hilda in that dark and frowzy tenement in Preston Street, on that wet Sunday morning, filled his heart with a revolt capricious and violent. He sprang to his feet, unreflecting, wilful, and strode into the hall.

"Can I have a cab?" he asked the porter.

"Certainly, sir," said the porter, as if saying, "You ask me too little. Why will you not ask for a white elephant so that I may prove my devotion?" And within five seconds the screech of a whistle sped through the air to the cabstand at the corner.

II

"Why am I doing this?" he once more asked himself, when he heard the bell ring, in answer to his pull, within the house in Preston Street. The desire for a tranquil life had always been one of his strongest instincts, and of late years the instinct had been satisfied, and so strengthened. Now he seemed to be obstinately searching for tumult; and he did not know why. He trembled at the sound of movement behind the door. "In a moment," he thought, "I shall be right in the thick of it!"

As he was expecting, she opened the door herself; but only a little, with the gesture habitual to women who live alone in apprehension, and she kept her hand on the latch.

"Good morning," he said curtly. "Can I speak to you?"

His eye could not blaze like hers, but all his self-respect depended on his valour now, and with desperation he affronted her. She opened the door wider, and he stepped in, and at once began to wipe his boots on the mat with nervous particularity.

"Frightful morning!" he grinned.

"Yes," she said. "Is that your cab outside?"

He admitted that it was.

"Perhaps if we go upstairs," she suggested.

Thanking her, he followed her upwards into the gloom at the head of the narrow stairs, and then along a narrow passage. The house appeared quite as unfavourably by day as by night. It was shabby. All its tints had merged by use and by time into one tint, nondescript and unpleasant, in which yellow

prospered. The drawing-room was larger than the dining-room by the poor width of the hall. It was a heaped, confused mass of chairs, sofas, small tables, draperies, embroideries, and valueless knick-knacks. There was no peace in it for the eye, neither on the walls nor on the floor. The gaze was driven from one ugliness to another without rest.

The fire-place was draped; the door was draped; the back of the piano was draped; and none of the dark suspicious stuffs showed a clear pattern. The faded chairs were hidden by faded antimacassars; the little futile tables concealed their rickets under vague needlework, on which were displayed in straw or tinsel frames pale portraits of dowdy people who had stood like sheep before fifteenth-rate photographers. The mantelpiece and the top of the piano were thickly strewn with fragments of coloured earthenware. At the windows hung heavy dark curtains from great rings that gleamed gilt near the ceiling; and lest the light which they admitted should be too powerful it was further screened by greyish white curtains within them. The carpet was covered in most places by small rugs or bits of other carpets, and in the deep shadows beneath sofas and chairs and behind the piano it seemed to slip altogether out of existence into black nothingness. The room lacked ventilation, but had the appearance of having been recently dusted.

III

Hilda closed the draped door with a mysterious, bitter cynical smile.

"Sit down," she said coldly.

"Last night," Edwin began, without sitting down, "when you mentioned the broker's man, were you joking or did you mean it?"

She was taken aback.

"Did I say 'broker's man'?"

"Well," said Edwin, "you've not forgotten, I suppose."

She sat down, with some precision of pose, on the principal sofa.

"Yes," she said at length. "As you're so curious. The landlords are in possession."

"The bailiffs still here?"

"Yes."

"But what are you going to do?"

"I'm expecting them to take the furniture away to-morrow, or Tuesday at the latest," she replied.

"And then what?"

"I don't know."

"But haven't you got any money?"

She took a purse from her pocket, and opened it with a show of impartial curiosity. "Two-and-seven," she said.

"Any servant in the house?"

"What do you think?" she replied. "Didn't you see me cleaning the door-plate last night? I *do* like that to look nice at any rate!"

"I don't see much use in that looking nice, when you've got the bailiffs in, and no servant and no money," Edwin said roughly, and added, still more roughly: "What should you do if anyone came inquiring for rooms?" He tried to guess her real mood, but her features would betray nothing.

"I was expecting three old ladies—sisters—next week," she said. "I'd been hoping I could hold out till they came. They're horrid women, though they don't know it; but they've stayed a couple of months in this house every winter for I don't know how many years, and they're firmly convinced it's the best house in Brighton. They're quite enough to keep it going by themselves when they're here. But I shall have to write and tell them not to come this time."

"Yes," said Edwin. "But I keep asking you—what then?"

"And I keep saying I don't know."

"You must have some plans?"

"I haven't." She put her lips together, and dimpled her chin, and again cynically smiled. At any rate she had not resented his inquisition.

"I suppose you know you're behaving like a perfect fool?" he suggested angrily. She did not wince.

"And what if I am? What's that got to do with you?" she asked, as if pleasantly puzzled.

"You'll starve. You can't live for ever on two-and-seven."

"Well?"

"And the boy? Is he going to starve?"

"Oh," said Hilda, "Janet will look after him till some-

thing turns up. The fact is, that's one reason why I allowed her to take him."

" 'Something turns up,' 'something turns up' ! " Edwin repeated deliberately, letting himself go. " You make me absolutely sick ! It's absolutely incredible how some people will let things slide ! What in the name of God Almighty do you think will turn up ? "

" I don't know," she said, with a certain weakness, still trying to be placidly bitter, and not now succeeding.

" Where is the bailiff-johnny ? "

" He's in the kitchen with one of his friends, drinking."

Edwin with bravado flopped his hat down forcefully on a table, pushed a chair aside, and strode towards the door.

" Where are you going ? " she asked in alarm, standing up.

" Where do you suppose I'm going ? I'm going to find out from that chap how much will settle it. If you can't show any common sense for yourself, other folks must show some for you—that's all. The brokers in the house ! I never heard of such work ! "

And indeed, to a respected and successful tradesman, the entrance of the bailiffs into a house did really seem to be the very depth of disaster and shame for the people of that house. Edwin could not remember that he had ever before seen a bailiff. To him a bailiff was like a bug—something heard of, something known to exist, but something not likely to enter the field of vision of an honest and circumspect man.

He would deal with the bailiff. He would have a short way with the bailiff. Secure in the confidence of his bankers, he was ready to bully the innocent bailiff. He would not reflect, would not pause. He had heated himself. His steam was up, and he would not let the pressure be weakened by argumentative hesitations. His emotion was not disagreeable.

When he was in the passage he heard the sound of a sob. Prudently, he had not banged the door after him. He stopped, and listened. Was it a sob ? Then he heard another sob. He went back to the drawing-room.

IV

Yes ! She stood in the middle of the room weeping. Save Clara, and possibly once or twice Maggie, he had never seen

a woman cry—that is, in circumstances of intimacy ; he had seen women crying in the street, and the spectacle usually pained him. On occasion he had very nearly made Maggie cry, and had felt exceedingly uncomfortable. But now, as he looked at the wet eyes and the shaken bosom of Hilda Cannon, he was aware of acute joy. Exquisite moment ! Damn her ! He could have taken her and beaten her in his sudden passion—a passion not of revenge, not of punishment ! He could have made her scream with the pain that his love would inflict.

She tried to speak, and failed, in a storm of sobs. He had left the door open. Half blind with tears she dashed to the door and shut it, and then turned and fronted him, with her hands hovering near her face.

“ I can’t let you do it ! ” she murmured imploringly, plaintively, and yet with that still obstinate bitterness in her broken voice.

“ Then who is to do it ? ” he demanded, less bitterly than she had spoken, nevertheless not softly. “ Who is to keep you if I don’t ? Have you got any other friends who’ll stand by you ? ”

“ I’ve got the Orgreaves,” she answered.

“ And do you think it would be better for the Orgreaves to keep you, or for me ? ” As she made no response, he continued : “ Anybody else besides the Orgreaves ? ”

“ No,” she muttered sulkily. “ I’m not the sort of woman that makes a lot of friends. I expect people don’t like me, as a rule.”

“ You’re the sort of woman that behaves like a blooming infant ! ” he said. “ Supposing I don’t help you ? What then—I keep asking you ? How shall you get money ? You can only borrow it—and there’s nobody but Janet, and she’d have to ask her father for it. Of course, if you’d sooner borrow from Osmond Orgreave than from me . . . ”

“ I don’t want to borrow from anyone,” she protested.

“ Then you want to starve ! And you want your boy to starve—or else to live on charity ! Why don’t you look facts in the face ? You’ll have to look them in the face sooner or later, and the sooner the better. You think you’re doing a fine thing by sitting tight and bearing it, and saying nothing,

and keeping it all a secret, until you get pitched into the street! Let me tell you you aren't."

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She dropped into a chair by the piano, and rested her elbows on the curved lid of the piano.

"You're frightfully cruel!" she sobbed, hiding her face.

He fidgeted away to the larger of the two windows, which was bayed, so that the room could boast a view of the sea. On the floor he noticed an open book, pages downwards. He picked it up. It was the poems of Crashaw, an author he had never read but had always been intending to read. Outside, the driver of his cab was bunching up his head and shoulders together under a large umbrella upon which the rain spattered. The flanks of the resigned horse glistened with rain.

"You needn't talk about cruelty!" he remarked, staring hard at the signboard of an optician opposite. He could hear the faint clanging of church bells.

After a pause she said, as if apologetically—

"Keeping a boarding-house isn't my line. But what could I do? My sister-in-law had it, and I was with her. And when she died. . . . Besides, I dare say I can keep a boarding-house as well as plenty of other people. But—well, it's no use going into that!"

Edwin abruptly sat down near her.

"Come, now," he said less harshly, more persuasively. "How much do you owe?"

"Oh!" she cried, pouting, and shifting her feet. "It's out of the question! They've distrained for seventy-five pounds."

"I don't care if they've distrained for seven hundred and seventy-five pounds!" She seemed just like a girl to him again now, in spite of her face and her figure. "If that was cleared off, you could carry on, couldn't you? This is just the season. Could you get a servant in, in time for these three sisters?"

"I could get a charwoman, anyhow," she said unwillingly.

"Well, do you owe anything else?"

"There'll be the expenses."



"Of the distraint?"

"Yes."

"That's nothing. I shall lend you a hundred pounds. It just happens that I've got fifty pounds on me in notes. That and a cheque'll settle the bailiff person, and the rest of the hundred I'll send you by post. It'll be a bit of working capital."

She rose and threaded between chairs and tables to the sofa, several feet from Edwin. With a vanquished and weary sigh, she threw herself on to the sofa.

"I never knew there was anybody like you in the world," she breathed, flicking away some fluff from her breast. She seemed to be regarding him, not as a benefactor, but as a natural curiosity.

## VI

He looked at her like a conqueror. He had taught her a thing or two. He had been a man. He was proud of himself. He was proud of all sorts of details in his conduct. The fifty pounds in notes, for example, was not an accident. Since the death of his father, he had formed the habit of never leaving his base of supplies without a provision far in excess of what he was likely to need. He was extravagant in nothing, but the humiliations of his penurious youth and early manhood had implanted in him a morbid fear of being short of money. He had fantastically surmised circumstances in which he might need a considerable sum at Brighton. And lo! the sequel had transformed his morbidity into prudence.

"This time yesterday," he reflected, in his triumph, "I hadn't even seen her, and didn't know where she was. Last night I was a fool. Half an hour ago she herself hadn't a notion that I was going to get the upper hand of her. . . . Why, it isn't two days yet since I left home! . . . And look where I am now!"

With pity and with joy he watched her slowly wiping her eyes. Thirty-four, perhaps; yet a child—compared to him! But if she did not give a natural ingenuous smile of relief, it was because she could not. If she acted foolishly it was because of her tremendous haughtiness. However, he had lowered that. He had shown her her master. He felt that

she had been profoundly wronged by destiny, and that gentleness must be lavished upon her.

In a casual tone he began to talk about the most rapid means of getting rid of the bailiff. He could not tolerate the incubus of the bailiff a moment longer than was absolutely unavoidable. At intervals a misgiving shot like a thin flying needle through the solid satisfaction of his sensations : " She is a strange and an incalculable woman—why am I doing this ? " Shot, and was gone, almost before perceived !

## CHAPTER VI

### THE RENDEZVOUS

#### I

**I**N the afternoon the weather cleared somewhat. Edwin, vaguely blissful, but with nothing to occupy him save reflection, sat in the lounge drinking tea at a Moorish table. An old Jew, who was likewise drinking tea at a Moorish table, had engaged him in conversation and was relating the history of a burglary in which he had lost from his flat in Bolton Street, Piccadilly, nineteen gold cigarette-cases and thirty-seven jewelled scarf-pins, tokens of esteem and regard offered to him by friends and colleagues at various crises of his life. The lounge was crowded, but not with tea-drinkers. Despite the horrid dismalness of the morning, hope had sent down from London trains full of people whose determination was to live and to see life in a grandiose manner. And all about the lounge of the Royal Sussex were groups of elegant youngish men and flaxen, uneasily stylish women, inviting the assistance of flattered waiters to decide what liqueurs they should have next. Edwin was humanly trying to publish in nonchalant gestures the scorn which he really felt for these nincompoops, but whose free expression was hindered by a layer of envy.

The hall-porter appeared, and his eye ranged like a condor's over the field until it discovered Edwin, whom he approached with a mien of joy and handed to him a letter.

Edwin took the letter with an air of custom, as if he was anxious to convince the company that his stay at the Royal Sussex was frequently punctuated by the arrival of special missives.

"Who brought this?" he asked.

"An oldish man, sir," said the porter, and bowed and departed.

The handwriting was hers. Probably the broker's man had offered to bring the letter. In the short colloquy with him in the morning, Edwin had liked the slatternly, coarse fellow. The bailiff could not, unauthorized, accept cheques, but his tone in suggesting an immediate visit to his employers had shown that he had bowels, that he sympathized with the difficulties of careless tenants in a harsh world of landlords. It was Hilda who, furnished with notes and cheque, had gone, in Edwin's cab, to placate the higher powers. She had preferred to go herself, and to go alone. Edwin had not insisted. He had so mastered her that he could afford to yield to her in trifles.

## II

The letter said exactly this: "Everything is all right and settled. I had no trouble at all. But I should like to speak to you this afternoon. Will you meet me on the West Pier at six?—H. C." No form of greeting! No thanks! The bare words necessary to convey a wish! On leaving her in the morning no arrangement had been made for a further interview. She had said nothing, and he had been too proud to ask—the terrible pride of the benefactor! It was only by chance that it had even occurred to him to say: "By the way, I am staying at the Royal Sussex." She had shown no curiosity whatever about him, his doings, his movements. She had not put to him a single question. He had intended to call at Preston Street on the Monday morning. And now a letter from her! Her handwriting had scarcely changed. He was to meet her on the pier. At her own request he now had a rendezvous with her on the pier! Why not at her house? Perhaps she was afraid of his power over her in the house. (Curious, how she, and she almost alone, roused the masculine force in him!) Perhaps she wanted to thank him in surroundings which would compel both of them to be calm. That would be like her! Essentially modest, restrained! And did she not know how to be meek, she who was so headstrong and independent!

He looked at the clock. The hour was not yet five. Nevertheless he felt obliged to go out, to bestir himself. On the misty, crowded, darkening promenade he abandoned himself

afresh to indulgence in the souvenance of the great critical scene of the morning. Yes, he had done marvels ; and Fate was astoundingly kind to him also. But there was one aspect of the affair that intrigued and puzzled him, and weakened his self-satisfaction. She had been defeated, yet he was baffled by her. She was a mystery within folds of mysteries. He was no nearer—he secretly felt—to the essential Her than he had been before the short struggle and his spectacular triumph. He wanted to reconstruct in his fancy all her emotional existence ; he wanted to get *at* her,—to possess her intimate mind,—and lo ! he could not even recall the expressions of her face from minute to minute during the battle. She hid herself from him. She eluded him. . . . Strange creature ! The polishing of the door-plate in the night ! That volume of Crashaw—on the floor ! Her cold, almost dæmonic smile ! Her sobs ! Her sudden retreats ! What was at the back of it all ? He remembered her divine gesture over the fond Shushions. He remembered the ecstatic quality of her surrender in the shop. He remembered her first love-letter : “ Every bit of me is absolutely yours.” And yet the ground seemed to be unsure beneath his feet, and he wondered whether he had ever in reality known her, ever grasped firmly the secret of her personality, even for an instant.

He said to himself that he would be seeing her face to face in an hour, and that then he would, by the ardour of his gaze, get behind those enigmatic features to the arcana they concealed.

### III

Before six o'clock it was quite dark. He thought it a strange notion, to fix a rendezvous at such an hour, on a day in autumn, in the open air. But perhaps she was very busy, doing servant's work in the preparation of her house for visitors. When he reached the pier gates at five minutes to six, they were closed, and the obscure vista of the pier as deserted as some northern pier in mid-winter. Naturally it was closed ! There was a notice prominently displayed that the pier would close that evening at dusk. What did she mean ? The truth was, he decided, that she lived in



the clouds, ordering her existence by means of sudden and capricious decisions in which facts were neglected,—and herein probably lay the explanation of her misfortunes. He was very philosophical ; rather amused than disturbed, because her house was scarcely a stone's-throw away : she could not escape him.

He glanced up and down the lighted promenade, and across the broad muddy road towards the opening of Preston Street. The crowds had disappeared ; only scattered groups and couples, and now and then a solitary, passed quickly in the gloom. The hotels were brilliant, and carriages with their flitting lamps were continually stopping in front of them ; but the blackness of the shop-fronts produced the sensation of melancholy proper to the day even in Brighton, and the renewed sound of church bells intensified this arid melancholy.

Suddenly he saw her, coming not across the road from Preston Street, but from the direction of Hove. He saw her before she saw him. Under the multiplicity of lamps her face was white and clear. He had a chance to read in it. But he could read nothing in it save her sadness, save that she had suffered. She seemed querulous, preoccupied, worried, and afflicted. She had the look of one who is never free from apprehension. Yet for him that look of hers had a quality unique, a quality that he had never found in another, but which he was completely unable to define. He wanted acutely to explain to himself what it was, and he could not.

"You are frightfully cruel," she had said. And he admitted that he had been. Yes, he had bullied her, her who, he was convinced, had always been the victim. In spite of her vigorous individuality she was destined to be a victim. He was sure that she had never deserved anything but sympathy and respect and affection. He was sure that she was the very incarnation of honesty—possibly she was too honest for the actual world. Did not the Orgreaves worship her ? And could he himself have been deceived in his estimate of her character ?

She recognized him only when she was close upon him. A faint, transient, wistful smile lightened her brooding face, pale and stern.

## IV

"Oh! There you are!" she exclaimed, in her clear voice. "Did I say six, or five, in my note?"

"Six."

"I was afraid I had done, when I came here at five and didn't find you. I'm so sorry."

"No!" he said. "I think *I* ought to be sorry. It's you who've had the waiting to do. The pier's closed now."

"It was just closing at five," she answered. "I ought to have known. But I didn't. The fact is, I scarcely ever go out. I remembered once seeing the pier open at night, and I thought it was always open." She shrugged her shoulders as if stopping a shiver.

"I hope you haven't caught cold," he said. "Suppose we walk along a bit."

They walked westwards in silence. He felt as though he were by the side of a stranger, so far was he from having pierced the secret of that face.

As they approached one of the new glazed shelters, she said—

"Can't we sit down a moment. I—I can't talk standing up. I must sit down."

They sat down, in an enclosed seat designed to hold four. And Edwin could feel the wind on his calves, which stretched beyond the screened side of the structure. Odd people passed dimly to and fro in front of them, glanced at them with nonchalant curiosity, and glanced away. On the previous evening he had observed couples in those shelters, and had wondered what could be the circumstances or the preferences which led them to accept such a situation. Certainly he could not have dreamed that within twenty-four hours he would be sitting in one of them with her, by her appointment, at her request. He thrilled with excitement—with delicious anxieties.

"Janet told you I was a widow," Hilda began, gazing at the ferrule of her umbrella, which gleamed on the ground.

"Yes." Again she was surprising him.

"Well, we arranged she should tell every one that. But I think you ought to know that I'm not."

"No?" he murmured weakly. And in one small unimportant region of his mind he reflected with astonishment

upon the hesitating but convincing air with which Janet had lied to him. Janet!

"After what you've done,"—she paused, and went on with unblurred clearness—"after what you've insisted on doing, I don't want there to be any misunderstanding. I'm not a widow. My husband's in prison. He'll be in prison for another six or seven years. That's all I wanted to tell you."

"I'm very sorry," he breathed. "I'd no idea you'd had this trouble." What could he say? What could anybody have said?

"I ought to have told you at once," she said. "I ought to have told you last night." Another pause. "Then perhaps you wouldn't have come again this morning."

"Yes, I should!" he asserted eagerly. "If you're in a hole, you're in a hole. What difference could it possibly make whether you were a widow or not?"

"Oh!" she said. "The wife of a convict . . . you know!"

He felt that she was evading the point.

She went on: "It's a good thing my three old ladies don't know, anyhow! . . . I'd no chance to tell you this morning. You were too much for me."

"I don't care whose wife you are!" he muttered, as though to himself, as though resenting something said by some one who had gone away and left him. "If you're in a hole, you're in a hole."

She turned and looked at him. His eyes fell before hers.

"Well," she said. "I've told you. I must go. I haven't a moment. Good night." She held out her hand. "You don't want me to thank you a lot, do you?"

"That I don't!" he exclaimed.

"Good night."

"But——"

"I must really go."

He rose and gave his hand. The next instant she was gone.

There was a deafening roar in his head. It was the complete destruction by earthquake of a city of dreams. A

calamity which left nothing—even to be desired! A tremendous silence reigned after the event.

## V

On the following evening, when from the windows of the London-to-Manchester express he saw in the gloom the high-leaping flames of the blast-furnaces that seem to guard eternally the southern frontier of the Five Towns, he felt that he had returned into daily reality out of an impossible world. Waiting for the loop-line train in the familiar tedium of Knype platform, staring at the bookstall, every item on which he knew by heart and despised, surrounded once more by local physiognomies, gestures, and accent, he thought to himself: "*This* is my lot. And if I get messing about, it only shows what a damned fool I am!" He called himself a damned fool because Hilda had proved to have a husband; because of that he condemned the whole expedition to Brighton as a piece of idiocy. His dejection was profound and bitter. At first, after Hilda had quitted him on the Sunday night, he had tried to be cheerful, had persuaded himself indeed that he was cheerful; but gradually his spirit had sunk, beaten and miserable. He had not called at Preston Street again. Pride forbade, and the terror of being misunderstood.

And when he sat at his own table, in his own dining-room, and watched the calm incurious Maggie dispensing to him his elaborate tea-supper with slightly more fuss and more devotion than usual, his thoughts, had they been somewhat less vague, might have been summed up thus: "The right sort of women don't get landed as the wives of convicts. Can you imagine such a thing happening to Maggie, for instance? Or Janet?" (And yet Janet was in the secret! This disturbed the flow of his reflections.) Hilda was too mysterious. Now she had half disclosed yet another mystery. But what? Why was her husband a convict? Under what circumstances? For what crime? Where? Since when? He knew the answer to none of these questions. More deeply than ever was that woman embedded in enigmas.

"What's this parcel on the sideboard?" Maggie inquired.

"Oh! I want you to send it in to Janet. It's from her particular friend, Mrs. Cannon—something for the kid, I

believe. I ran across her in Brighton, and she asked me if I'd bring the parcel along."

The innocence of his manner was perfectly acted. He wondered that he could do it so well. But really there was no danger. Nobody in Bursley, or in the world, had the least suspicion of his past relations with Hilda. The only conceivable danger would have been in hiding the fact that he had met her in Brighton.

"Of course," said Maggie, mildly interested. "I was forgetting she lived at Brighton. Well?" and she put a few casual questions, to which Edwin casually replied.

"You look tired," she said later.

He astonished her by admitting that he was. According to all precedent her statement ought to have drawn forth a quick contradiction.

The sad image of Hilda would not be dismissed. He had to carry it about with him everywhere, and it was heavy enough to fatigue a stronger than Edwin Clayhanger. The pathos of her situation overwhelmed him, argue as he might about the immunity of 'the right sort of women' from a certain sort of disaster. On the Tuesday he sent her a post-office order for twenty pounds. It rather more than made up the agreed sum of a hundred pounds. She returned it, saying she did not need it. "Little fool!" he said. He was not surprised. He was, however, very much surprised, a few weeks later, to receive from Hilda her own cheque for eighty pounds odd! More mystery! An absolutely incredible woman! Whence had she obtained that eighty pounds? Needless to say, she offered no explanation. He abandoned all conjecture. But he could not abandon the image. And first Auntie Hamps said, and then Clara, and then even Maggie admitted that Edwin was sticking too close to business and needed a change, needed rousing. Auntie Hamps urged openly that a wife ought to be found for him. But in a few days the great talkers of the family, Auntie Hamps and Clara, had grown accustomed to Edwin's state, and some new topic supervened.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE WALL

#### I

ONE morning—towards the end of November—Edwin, attended by Maggie, was rearranging books in the drawing-room after breakfast when there came a startling loud tap at the large central pane of the window. Both of them jumped.

“Who’s throwing?” Edwin exclaimed.

“I expect it’s that boy,” said Maggie, almost angrily.

“Not Georgie?”

“Yes. I wish you’d go and stop him. You’ve no idea what a tiresome little thing he is. And so rough too!”

This attitude of Maggie towards the mysterious nephew was a surprise for Edwin. She had never grumbled about him before. In fact they had seen little of him. For a fortnight he had not been abroad, and the rumour ran that he was unwell, that he was ‘not so strong as he ought to be.’ And now Maggie suddenly charged him with a whole series of misdoings! But it was Maggie’s way to keep unpleasant things from Edwin for a time, in order to save her important brother from being worried, and then in a moment of tension to fling them full in his face, like a wet clout.

“What’s he been up to?” Edwin inquired for details.

“Oh! I don’t know,” answered Maggie vaguely. At the same instant came another startling blow on the window. “There!” Maggie cried, in triumph, as if saying: “That’s what he’s been up to!” After all, the windows were Maggie’s own windows.

Edwin left on the sofa a whole pile of books that he was sorting, and went out into the garden. On the top of the wall separating him from the Orgreaves a row of damaged earthenware objects—jugs and jars chiefly—at once caught his eye.

He witnessed the smashing of one of them and then he ran to the wall, and taking a spring, rested on it with his arms, his toes pushed into crevices. Young George, with hand outstretched to throw, in the garden of the Orgreaves, seemed rather diverted by this apparition.

"Hello!" said Edwin. "What are you up to?"

"I'm practising breaking crocks," said the child. That he had acquired the local word gave Edwin pleasure.

"Yes, but do you know you're practising breaking my windows too? When you aim too high you simply can't miss one of my windows."

George's face was troubled, as he examined the facts, which had hitherto escaped his attention, that there was a whole world of consequences on the other side of the wall, and that a missile which did not prove its existence against either the wall or a crock had not necessarily ceased to exist. Edwin watched the face with a new joy, as though looking at some wonder of nature under a microscope. It seemed to him that he now saw vividly why children were interesting.

"I can't see any windows from here," said George, in defence.

"If you climb up here you'll see them all right."

"Yes, but I can't climb up. I've tried to, a lot of times. Even when I stood on my toes on this stump I could only just reach to put the crocks on the top."

"What did you want to get on the wall for?"

"I wanted to see that swing of yours."

"Well," said Edwin, laughing, "if you could remember the swing why couldn't you remember the windows?"

George shook his head at Edwin's stupidity, and looked at the ground. "A swing isn't windows," he said. Then he glanced up with a diffident smile: "I've often been wanting to come and see you."

Edwin was tremendously flattered. If he had made a conquest, the child by this frank admission had made a greater.

"Then why didn't you come?"

"I couldn't, by myself. Besides, my back hasn't been well. Did they tell you?"

George was so naturally serious that Edwin decided to be serious too.

"I did hear something about it," he replied, with the grave confidential tone that he would have used to a man of his own age. This treatment was evidently appreciated by George, and always afterwards Edwin conversed with him as with an equal, forbearing from facetiousness.

Damp though it was, Edwin twisted himself round and sat on the wall next to the crocks, and bent over the boy beneath, who gazed with upturned face.

"Why didn't you ask Auntie Janet to bring you?"

"I don't generally ask for things that I really want," said the boy, with a peculiar glance.

"I see," said Edwin, with an air of comprehension. He did not, however, comprehend. He only felt that the boy was wonderful. Imagine the boy saying that! He bent lower. "Come on up," he said. "I'll give you a hand. Stick your feet into that nick there."

## II

In an instant George was standing on the wall, light as fluff. Edwin held him by the legs, and his hand was on Edwin's cap. The feel of the boy was delightful; he was so lithe and so yielding, and yet firm. And his glance was so trustful and admiring. "Rough!" thought Edwin, remembering Maggie's adjective. "He isn't a bit rough! Unruly? Well, I dare say he can be unruly if he cares to be. It all depends how you handle him." Thus Edwin reflected in the pride of conquest, holding close to the boy, and savouring intimately his charm. Even the boy's slightness attracted him. Difficult to believe that he was nine years old! His body was indeed backward. So too, it appeared, was his education. And yet was there not the wisdom of centuries in 'I don't generally ask for things that I really want'?

Suddenly the boy wriggled, and gave a sound of joy that was almost a yell. "Look!" he cried.

The covered top of the steam-car could just be seen gliding along above the high wall that separated Edwin's garden from the street.

"Yes," Edwin agreed. "Funny, isn't it?" But he

considered that such glee at such a trifle was really more characteristic of six or seven than of nine years. George's face was transformed by ecstasy.

"It's when things move like that—horizontal!" George explained, pronouncing the word carefully.

Edwin felt that there was no end to the surpassing strangeness of this boy. One moment he was aged six, and the next he was talking about horizontality.

"Why? What do you mean?"

"I don't know!" George sighed. "But somehow . . ." Then, with fresh vivacity: "I tell you—when Auntie Janet comes to wake me up in the morning the cat comes in too, with its tail up in the air—you know!" Edwin nodded. "Well, when I'm lying in bed I can't see the cat, but I can see the top of its tail sailing along the edge of the bed. But if I sit up I can see all the cat, and that spoils it, so I don't sit up at first."

The child was eager for Edwin to understand his pleasure in horizontal motion that had no apparent cause, like the tip of a cat's tail on the horizon of a bed, or the roof of a tramcar on the horizon of the wall. And Edwin was eager to understand, and almost persuaded himself that he did understand; but he could not be sure. A marvellous child—disconcerting! He had a feeling of inferiority to the child, because the child had seen beauty where he had not dreamed of seeing it.

"Want a swing," he suggested, "before I have to go off to business?"

### III

When it occurred to him that he had had as much violent physical exercise as was good for his years, and that he had left his books in disarray, and that his business demanded him, Edwin apologetically announced that he must depart, and the child admitted that Aunt Janet was probably waiting to give him his lessons.

"Are you going back the way you came? You'd better. It's always best," said Edwin.

"Is it?"

"Yes."

He lifted and pushed the writhing form on to the wall, dislodging a jar, which crashed dully on the ground.

"Auntie Janet told me I could have them to do what I liked with. So I break them," said George, "when they don't break themselves!"

"I bet she never told you to put them on this wall," said Edwin.

"No, she didn't. But it was the best place for aiming. And she told me it didn't matter how many crocks I broke, because they make crocks here. Do they really?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because there's clay here," said Edwin glibly.

"Where?"

"Oh! Round about."

"White, like that?" exclaimed George eagerly, handling a teapot without a spout. He looked at Edwin: "Will you take me to see it? I should like to see white ground."

"Well," said Edwin, more cautiously, "the clay they get about here isn't exactly white."

"Then do they make it white?"

"As a matter of fact the white clay comes from a long way off—Cornwall, for instance."

"Then why do they make the things here?" George persisted, with the annoying obstinacy of his years. He had turned the teapot upside down. "This was made here. It's got 'Bursley' on it. Auntie Janet showed me."

Edwin was caught. He saw himself punished for that intellectual sloth which leads adults to fob children off with any kind of a slipshod, dishonestly simplified explanation of phenomena whose adequate explanation presents difficulty. He remembered how nearly twenty years earlier he had puzzled over the same question and for a long time had not found the answer.

"I'll tell you how it is," he said, determined to be conscientious. "It's like this——" He had to pause. Queer, how hard it was to state the thing coherently! "It's like this. In the old days they used to make crocks anyhow, very rough, out of any old clay. And crocks were first made here because the people found common yellow clay, and the coal to burn it



with, lying close together in the ground. You see how handy it was for them."

"Then the old crocks were yellow?"

"More or less. Then people got more particular, you see, and when white clay was found somewhere else they had it brought here, because everybody was used to making crocks here, and they had all the works and the tools they wanted, and the coal too. Very important, the coal! Much easier to bring the clay to the people and the works, than cart off all the people—and their families, don't forget—and so on, to the clay, and build fresh works into the bargain. . . . That's why. Now are you sure you see?"

George ignored the question. "I suppose they used up all the yellow clay there was here, long ago?"

"Not much!" said Edwin. "And they never will! You don't know what a sagger is, I reckon?"

"What is a sagger?"

"Well, I can't stop to tell you all that now. But I will some time. They make sagers out of the yellow clay."

"Will you show me the yellow clay?"

"Yes, and some sagers too."

"When?"

"I don't know. As soon as I can."

"Will you to-morrow?"

To-morrow happened to be Thursday. It was not Edwin's free afternoon, but it was an afternoon to which a sort of licence attached. He yielded to the ruthless egotism of the child.

"All right!" he said.

"You won't forget?"

"You can rely on me. Ask your auntie if you may go, and if she says you may, be ready for me to pull you up over the wall here, about three o'clock."

"Auntie will have to let me go," said George, in a savage tone, as Edwin helped him to slip down into the garden of the Orgreaves. Edwin went off to business with a singular consciousness of virtue, and with pride in his successful manner of taming wayward children, and with a very strong new interest in the immediate future.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE FRIENDSHIP

#### I

THE next afternoon George's invincible energy took both himself and the great bearded man, Edwin, to a certain spot on the hollow confines of the town towards Turnhill, where there were several pits of marl and clay. They stared in silence at a vast ochreous-coloured glistening cavity in the ground, on the high edges of which grew tufts of grass amid shards and broken bottles. In the bottom of the pit were laid planks, and along the planks men with pieces of string tied tight round their legs beneath the knees drew large barrows full or empty, sometimes insecurely over pools of yellow water into which the plank sagged under their weight, and sometimes over little hillocks and through little defiles formed in the basin of the mine. They seemed to have no aim. The whole cavity had a sticky look which at first amused George, but on the whole he was not interested, and Edwin gathered that the clay-pit in some mysterious way fell short of expectations. A mineral line of railway which, near by, ambled at random like a pioneer over rough country, was much more successful than the pit in winning his approval.

"Can we go and see the saggars now?" he suggested.

Edwin might have taken him to the manufactory in which Albert Benbow was a partner, but he preferred not to display to the father of Clara's offspring his avuncular patronage of George Cannon, and he chose the works of a customer down at Shawport for whom he was printing a somewhat ambitious catalogue. He would call at the works and talk about the catalogue, and then incidentally mention that his young friend desired to see saggars.

"I suppose God put that clay there so that people could

practise on it first, before they tried the white clay," George observed, as the pair descended Oldcastle Street.

Decidedly he had moments of talking like an infant, like a baby of three. Edwin recalled that Hilda used to torture herself about questions of belief when she was not three but twenty-three. The scene in the garden porch seemed to have happened after all not very long ago. Yet a new generation, unconceived on that exciting and unforgettable night, had since been born and had passed through infancy and was now trotting and arguing and dogmatizing by his side. It was strange, but it was certainly a fact, that George regarded him as a being immeasurably old. He still felt a boy.

How ought he to talk to the child concerning God? He was about to make a conventional response, when he stopped himself. "Confound it! Why should I?" he thought.

"If I were you I shouldn't worry about God," he said, aloud, in a casual and perhaps slightly ironic tone.

"Oh, I don't!" George answered positively. "But now and then He comes into your head, doesn't He? I was only just thinking——" The boy ceased, being attracted by the marvellous spectacle of a man perilously balanced on a crate-float driving a long-tailed pony full tilt down the steep slope of Oldcastle Street: it was equal to a circus.

## II

The visit to the works was a particularly brilliant success. By good fortune an oven was just being 'drawn,' and the child had sight of the finest, the most barbaric picture that the manufacture of earthenware, from end to end picturesque, offers to the imaginative observer. Within the dark and sinister bowels of the kiln, illuminated by pale rays that came down through the upper orifice from the smoke-soiled sky, half-naked figures moved like ghosts, strenuous and damned, among the saggars of ware. At rapid intervals they emerged, their hairy torsos glistening with sweat, carrying the fired ware, which was still too hot for any but inured fingers to touch: an endless procession of plates and saucers and cups and mugs and jugs and basins, thousands and thousands! George stared in an enchanted silence of awe. And presently one of the Hercules's picked him up and held him for a moment

within the portal of the torrid kiln, and he gazed at the high curved walls, like the walls of a gigantic tomb, and at the yellow saggars that held the ware. Now he knew what a sagger was.

"I'm glad you took me," he said afterwards, clearly impressed by the authority of Edwin, who could stroll out and see such terrific goings-on whenever he chose. During all the walk home he did not speak.

On the Saturday, nominally in charge of his Auntie Janet, he called upon his chum with some water-colour drawings that he had done; they showed naked devils carrying cups and plates amid bright salmon-tinted flames: designs horrible, and horribly crude, interesting only because a child had done them. But somehow Edwin was obscurely impressed by them, and also he was touched by the coincidence that George painted in water-colours, and he, too, had once painted in water-colours. He was, moreover, expected to judge the drawings as an expert. On Monday he brought up the most complicated box of water-colours that his shop contained, and presented it to George, who, astounded, dazed, bore it away to his bedroom without a single word. Their friendship was sealed and published; it became a fact recognized by the two families.

### III

About a week later, after a visit of a couple of days to Manchester, Edwin went out into the garden as usual when breakfast was finished, and discovered George standing on the wall. The boy had learned how to climb the wall from his own side of it without help.

"I say!" George cried, in a loud, rough, angry voice, as soon as he saw Edwin at the garden door. "I've got to go off in a minute, you know."

"Go off? Where?"

"Home. Didn't they tell you in your house? Auntie Janet and I came to your house yesterday, after I'd waited on the wall for you I don't know how long, and you never came. We came to tell you, but you weren't in. So we asked Miss Clayhanger to tell you. Didn't Miss Clayhanger tell you?"

"No," said Edwin. "She must have forgot." It occurred

to him that even the simple and placid Maggie had her personal prejudices, and that one of them might be against this child. For some reason she did not like the child. She positively could not have forgotten the child's visit with Janet. She had merely not troubled to tell him: a touch of that malice which, though it be as rare as radium, nevertheless exists even in the most benignant natures. Edwin and George exchanged a silent, puzzled glance.

"Well, that's a nice thing!" said the boy. It was.

"When are you going home?"

"I'm going *now*! Mr. Orgreave has to go to London to-day, and mamma wrote to Auntie Janet yesterday to say that I must go with him, if he'd let me, and she would meet me at London. She wants me back. So Auntie Janet is taking me to Knype to meet Mr. Orgreave there—he's gone to his office first. And the gardener has taken my luggage in the barrow up to Bleakridge Station. Auntie's putting her hat on. Can't you see I've got my other clothes on?"

"Yes," said Edwin, "I noticed that."

"And my other hat?"

"Yes."

"I've promised auntie I'll come and put my overcoat on as soon as she calls me. I say—you wouldn't believe how jammed my trunk is with that paint-box and everything! Auntie Janet had to sit on it like anything! I say—shall you be coming to Brighton soon?"

Edwin shook his head.

"I never go to Brighton."

"But when I asked you once if you'd been, you said you had."

"So I have, but that was an accident."

"Was it long since?"

"Well," said Edwin, "you ought to know. It was when I brought that parcel for you."

"Oh! Of course!"

Edwin was saying to himself: "She's sent for him on purpose. She's heard that we're great friends, and she's sent for him! She means to stop it! That's what it is!" He had no rational basis for this assumption. It was instinctive. And yet why should she desire to interfere with the course of



the friendship? How could it react unpleasantly on her? There obviously did not exist between mother and son one of those passionate attachments which misfortune and sorrow sometimes engender. She had been able to let him go. And as for George, he seldom mentioned his mother. He seldom mentioned anybody who was not actually present, or necessary to the fulfilment of the idea that happened to be reigning in his heart. He lived a life of absorption, hypnotized by the idea of the moment. These ideas succeeded each other like a dynasty of kings, like a series of dynasties, marked by frequent dynastic quarrels, by depositions and sudden deaths; but George's loyalty was the same to all of them; it was absolute.

"Well, anyhow," said he, "I shall come back here. Mother will have to let me."

And he jumped down from the wall into Edwin's garden, carelessly, his hands in his pockets, with a familiar ease of gesture that implied practice. He had in fact often done it before. But just this time—perhaps he was troubled by the unaccustomed clothes—having lighted on his feet, he failed to maintain his balance and staggered back against the wall.

"Now, clumsy!" Edwin commented.

The boy turned pale, and bit his lip, and then Edwin could see the tears in his eyes. One of his peculiarities was that he had no shame whatever about crying. He could not, or he would not, suffer stoically. Now he put his hands to his back, and writhed.

"Hurt yourself?" Edwin asked.

George nodded. He was very white, and startled. At first he could not command himself sufficiently to be able to articulate. Then he spluttered, "My back!" He subsided gradually into a sitting posture.

Edwin ran to him, and picked him up. But he screamed until he was set down. At the open drawing-room window Maggie was arranging curtains. Edwin reluctantly left George for an instant and hurried to the window. "I say, Maggie, bring a chair or something out, will you? This dashed kid's fallen and hurt himself."

"I'm not surprised," said Maggie calmly. "What surprises me is that you should ever have given him permission

to scramble over the wall and trample all about the flower-beds the way he does ! ”

However, she moved at once to obey.

He returned to George. Then Janet's voice was heard from the other garden, calling him : “ George ! Georgie ! Nearly time to go ! ”

Edwin put his head over the wall.

“ He's fallen and hurt his back,” he answered to Janet, without any prelude.

“ His back ! ” she repeated in a frightened tone.

Everybody was afraid of that mysterious back. And George himself was most afraid of it.

“ I'll get over the wall,” said Janet.

Edwin quitted the wall. Maggie was coming out of the house with a large cane easy chair and a large cushion. But George was now standing up, through still crying. His beautiful best sailor hat lay on the winter ground.

“ Now,” said Maggie to him, “ you mustn't be a baby ! ”

He glared at her resentfully. She would have dropped down dead on the spot if his wet and angry glance could have killed her. She was a powerful woman. She seized him carefully and set him in the chair, and supported the famous spine with the cushion.

“ I don't think he's much hurt,” she decided. “ He couldn't make that noise if he was, and see how his colour's coming back ! ”

In another case Edwin would have agreed with her, for the tendency of both was to minimize an ill and to exaggerate the philosophical attitude in the first moments of any occurrence that looked serious. But now he honestly thought that her judgment was being influenced by her prejudice, and he felt savage against her. The worst was that it was all his fault. Maggie was odiously right. He ought never to have encouraged the child to be acrobatic on the wall. It was he who had even put the idea of the wall as a means of access into the child's head.

“ Does it hurt ? ” he inquired, bending down, his hands on his knees.

“ Yes,” said George, ceasing to cry.

"Much?" asked Maggie, dusting the sailor hat and sticking it on his head.

"No, not much," George unwillingly admitted. Maggie could not at any rate say that he did not speak the truth.

Janet, having obtained steps, stood on the wall in her elaborate street-array.

"Who's going to help me down?" she demanded anxiously. She was not so young and sprightly as once she had been. Edwin obeyed the call.

Then the three of them stood round the victim's chair, and the victim, like a god, permitted himself to be contemplated. And Janet had to hear Edwin's account of the accident, and also Maggie's account of it, as seen from the window.

"I don't know what to do!" said Janet.

"It is annoying, isn't it?" said Maggie. "And just as you were going to the station too!"

"I—I think I'm all right," George announced.

Janet passed a hand down his back, as though expecting to be able to judge the condition of his spine through the thickness of all his clothes.

"Are you?" she questioned doubtfully.

"It's nothing," said Maggie, with firmness.

"He'd be all right in the train," said Janet. "It's the walking to the station that I'm afraid of. . . . You never know."

"I can carry him," said Edwin quickly.

"Of course you can't!" Maggie contradicted. "And even if you could you'd jog him far worse than if he walked himself."

"There's no time to get a cab, now," said Janet, looking at her watch. "If we aren't at Knype, father will wonder what on earth's happened, and I don't know what his mother would say!"

"Where's that old pram?" Edwin demanded suddenly of Maggie.

"What? Clara's? It's in the outhouse."

"I can run him up to the station in two jiffs in that."

"Oh yes! Do!" said George. "You must. And then lift me into the carriage!"

The notion was accepted.

"I hope it's the best thing to do," said Janet, apprehensive and doubtful, as she hurried off to the other house in order to get the boy's overcoat and meet Edwin and the perambulator at the gates.

"I'm certain it is," said Maggie calmly. "There's nothing really the matter with that child."

"Well, it's very good of Edwin, I'm sure," said Janet.

Edwin had already rushed for the perambulator, an ancient vehicle which was sometimes used in the garden for infant Benbows.

In a few moments Trafalgar Road had the spectacle of the bearded and eminent master-printer, Edwin Clayhanger, steaming up its muddy pavement behind a perambulator with a grown boy therein. And dozens of persons who had not till then distinguished the boy from other boys, inquired about his identity, and gossip was aroused. Maggie was displeased.

In obedience to the command Edwin lifted George into the train; and the feel of his little slippery body, and the feel of Edwin's mighty arms, seemed to make them more intimate than ever. Except for dirty tear-marks on his cheeks, George's appearance was absolutely normal.

Edwin expected to receive a letter from him, but none came, and this negligence wounded Edwin.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE ARRIVAL

#### I

ON a Saturday in the early days of the following year 1892, Edwin by special request had gone in to take afternoon tea with the Orgreaves. Osmond Orgreave was just convalescent after an attack of influenza, and in the opinion of Janet wanted cheering up. The task of enlivening him had been laid upon Edwin. The guest, and Janet and her father and mother sat together in a group round the fire in the drawing-room.

The drawing-room alone had grown younger with years. Money had been spent on it rather freely. During the previous decade Osmond's family, scattering, had become very much less costly to him, but his habits of industry had not changed, nor his faculty for collecting money. Hence the needs of the drawing-room, which had been pressing for quite twenty years, had at last been satisfied ; indeed Osmond was saving, through mere lack of that energetic interest in things which is necessary to spending. Possibly even the drawing-room would have remained untouched—both Janet and her elder sister Marian sentimentally preferred it as it was—had not Mrs. Orgreave been ' positively ashamed ' of it when her married children, including Marian, came to see her. They were all married now, except Janet and Charlie and Johnnie ; and Alicia at any rate had a finer drawing-room than her mother. So far as the parents were concerned Charlie might as well have been married, for he had acquired a partnership in a practice at Ealing and seldom visited home. Johnnie, too, might as well have been married. Since Jimmie's wedding he had used the house strictly as an hotel, for sleeping and eating, and not always for sleeping. He could not be retained at home. His interests were mysterious, and lay outside it. Janet alone



was faithful to the changed drawing-room, with its new carpets and wall-papers and upholstery.

"I've got more grandchildren than children now," said Mrs. Orgreave to Edwin, "and I never thought to have!"

"Have you really?" Edwin responded. "Let me see——"

"I've got nine."

"Ten, mother," Janet corrected. "She's forgetting her own grandchildren now!"

"Bless me!" exclaimed Mrs. Orgreave, taking off her eyeglasses and wiping them, "I'd missed Tom's youngest."

"You'd better not tell Emily that," said Janet. (Emily was the mother of Tom's children.) "Here, give me those eyeglasses, dear. You'll never get them right with a linen handkerchief. Where's your bit of chamois?"

Mrs. Orgreave absently and in somewhat stiff silence handed over the pince-nez. She was now quite an old woman, small, shapeless, and delightfully easy-going, whose sense of humour had not developed with age. She could never see a joke which turned upon her relations with her grandchildren, and in fact the jocular members of the family had almost ceased to employ this subject of humour. She was undoubtedly rather foolish about her grandchildren—'fond,' as they say down there. The parents of the grandchildren did not object to this foolishness—that is, they only pretended to object. The task of preventing a pardonable weakness from degenerating into a tedious and mischievous mania fell solely upon Janet. Janet was ready to admit that the health of the grandchildren was a matter which could fairly be left to their fathers and mothers, and she stood passive when Mrs. Orgreave's grandmotherly indulgences seemed inimical to their health; but Mrs. Orgreave was apt to endanger her own health in her devotion to the profession of grandmother—for example, by sitting up to unchristian hours with a needle. Then there would be a struggle of wills, in which of course Mrs. Orgreave, being the weaker, was defeated; though her belief survived that she and she alone, by watchfulness, advice, sagacity and energy, kept her children's children out of the grave. On all other questions the harmony between Janet and her mother was complete, and Mrs. Orgreave undoubtedly considered that

no mother had ever had a daughter who combined so many virtues and charms.

## II

Mr. Orgreave, forgetful of the company, was deciphering the "British Medical Journal" in the twilight of the afternoon. His doctor had lent him this esoteric periodical because there was an article therein on influenza, and Mr. Orgreave was very much interested in influenza.

"You remember the influenza of '89, Edwin?" he asked suddenly, looking over the top of the paper.

"Do I?" said Edwin. "Yes, I fancy I do remember a sort of epidemic."

"I should think so, indeed!" Janet murmured.

"Well," continued Mr. Orgreave, "I'm like you. I thought it was an epidemic. But it seems it wasn't. It was a pandemic. What's a pandemic, now?"

"Give it up," said Edwin.

"You might just look in the dictionary—Ogilvie there," and while Edwin ferreted in the bookcase, Mr. Orgreave proceeded, reading: "'The pandemic of 1889 has been followed by epidemics, and by endemic prevalence in some areas!' So you see how many *demics* there are! I suppose they'd call it an epidemic we've got in the town now."

His voice had changed on the last sentence. He had meant to be a little facetious about the Greek words; but it was the slowly prepared and rather exasperating facetiousness of an ageing man, and he had dropped it listlessly, as though he himself had perceived this. Influenza had weakened and depressed him; he looked worn, and even outworn. But not influenza alone was responsible for his appearance. The incredible had happened: Osmond Orgreave was getting older. His bald head was not the worst sign of his declension, nor the thickened veins in his hands, nor the deliberation of his gestures, nor even the unsprightliness of his wit. The worst sign was that he was losing his terrific zest in life; his palate for the intense savour of it was dulled. In this last attack of influenza he had not fought against the onset of the disease. He had been wise; he had obeyed his doctor, and laid down his arms at once; and he showed no imprudent anxiety to resume them. Yes, a changed Osmond! He was

still one of the most industrious professional men in Bursley; but he worked from habit, not from passion.

When Edwin had found 'pandemic' in Ogilvie, Mr. Orgreave wanted to see the dictionary for himself, and then he wanted the Greek dictionary, which could not be discovered, and then he began to quote further from the "British Medical Journal."

"It may be said that there are three well-marked types of the disease, attacking respectively the respiratory, the digestive, and the nervous system.' Well, I should say I'd had 'em all three. 'As a rule the attack——'"

Thus he went on. Janet made a *moue* at Edwin, who returned the signal. These youngsters were united in good-natured forbearing condescension towards Mr. Orgreave. The excellent old fellow was prone to be tedious; they would accept his tediousness, but they would not disguise from each other their perception of it.

"I hear the Vicar of St. Peter's is very ill indeed," said Mrs. Orgreave, blandly interrupting her husband.

"What? Heve? With influenza?"

"Yes. I wouldn't tell you before because I thought it might pull you down again."

Mr. Orgreave, in silence, stared at the immense fire.

"What about this tea, Janet?" he demanded.

Janet rang the bell.

"Oh! I'd have done that!" said Edwin, as soon as she had done it.

### III

While Janet was pouring out the tea, Edwin restored Ogilvie to his place in the bookcase, feeling that he had had enough of Ogilvie.

"Not so many books here now as there used to be!" he said, vacuously amiable, as he shut the glass door which had once protected the treasures of Tom Orgreave.

For a man who had been specially summoned to the task of cheering up, it was not a felicitous remark. In the first place it recalled the days when the house, which was now a hushed retreat where settled and precise habits sheltered themselves from a changing world, had been an arena for the jolly, exciting combats of outspread individualities. And in the second place it recalled a slight difficulty between Tom

and his father. Osmond Orgreave was a most reasonable father, but no father is perfect in reasonableness, and Osmond had quite inexcusably resented that Tom on his marriage should take away all Tom's precious books. Osmond's attitude had been that Tom might in decency have left, at any rate, some of the books. It was not that Osmond had a taste for book-collecting: it was merely that he did not care to see his house depleted and bookcases empty. But Tom had shown no compassion. He had removed not merely every scrap of a book belonging to himself, but also two bookcases which he happened to have paid for. The weight of public opinion was decidedly against Mr. Orgreave, who had to yield and affect pleasantness. Nevertheless books had become a topic which was avoided between father and son.

"Ah!" muttered Mr. Orgreave, satirical, in response to Edwin's clumsiness.

"Suppose we have another gas lighted," Janet suggested. The servant had already lighted several burners and drawn the blinds and curtains.

Edwin comprehended that he had been a blundering fool, and that Janet's object was to create a diversion. He lit the extra burner above her head. She sat there rather straight and rather prim between her parents, sticking to them, smoothing creases for them, bearing their weight, living for them. She was the kindest, the most dignified, the most capable creature; but she was now an old maid. You saw it even in the way she poured tea and dropped pieces of sugar into the cups. Her youth was gone; her complexion was nearly gone. And though in one aspect she seemed indispensable, in another the chief characteristic of her existence seemed to be a tragic futility. Whenever she came seriously into Edwin's thoughts she saddened him. Useless for him to attempt to be gay and frivolous in that house!

## IV

With the inevitable passionate egotism of his humanity he almost at once withdrew his aroused pity from her to himself. Look at himself! Was he not also to be sympathized with? What was the object or the use of his being alive? He worked, saved, improved his mind, voted right, practised

philosophy, and was generally benevolent ; but to what end ? Was not his existence miserable and his career a respectable fiasco ? He, too, had lost zest. He had diligently studied both Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus ; he was enthusiastic, to others, about the merit of these two expert daily philosophers ; but what had they done for him ? Assuredly they had not enabled him to keep the one treasure of this world—zest. The year was scarcely a week old, and he was still young enough to have begun the year with resolutions and fresh hopes and aspirations, but already the New Year sensation had left him, and the year might have been dying in his heart.

And yet what could he have done that he had not done ? With what could he reproach himself ? Ought he to have continued to run after a married woman ? Ought he to have set himself titanically against the conventions amid which he lived, and devoted himself either to secret intrigue or to the outraging of the susceptibilities which environed him ? There was only one answer. He could not have acted otherwise than he had acted. His was not the temperament of a rebel, nor was he the slave of his desires. He could sympathize with rebels and with slaves, but he could not join them ; he regarded himself as spiritually their superior.

And then the disaster of Hilda's career ! He felt, more than ever, that he had failed in sympathy with her overwhelming misfortune. In the secrecy of his heart a full imaginative sympathy had been lacking. He had not realized, as he seemed to realize then, in front of the fire in the drawing-room of the Orgreaves, what it must be to be the wife of a convict. Janet, sitting there as innocent as a doe, knew that Hilda was the wife of a convict. But did her parents know ? And was she aware that he knew ? He wondered, drinking his tea.

## v

Then the servant—not the Martha who had been privileged to smile on duty if she felt so inclined—came with a tawny gold telegram on a silver plate, and hesitated a moment as to where she should bestow it.

“ Give it to me, Selina,” said Janet.

Selina impassively obeyed, imitating as well as she could the deportment of an automaton ; and went away.



"That's my telegram," said Mr. Orgreave. "How is it addressed?"

"Orgreave, Bleakridge, Bursley."

"Then it's mine."

"Oh no, it isn't!" Janet archly protested. "If you have your business telegrams sent here you must take the consequences. I always open all telegrams that come here, don't I, mother?"

Mrs. Orgreave made no reply, but waited with candid and fretful impatience, thinking of her five absent children, and her ten grandchildren, for the telegram to be opened.

Janet opened it.

Her lips parted to speak, and remained so in silent astonishment. "Just read that!" she said to Edwin, passing the telegram to him; and she added to her father: "It was for me, after all."

Edwin read aloud: "Am sending George down to-day. Please meet 6.30 train at Knype. Love. Hilda."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Mrs. Orgreave. "You don't mean to tell me she's letting that boy travel alone! What next!"

"Where's the telegram sent from?" asked Mr. Orgreave.

Edwin examined the official indications: "Victoria."

"Then she's brought him up to London, and she's putting him in a train at Euston. That's it."

"Only there is no London train that gets to Knype at half-past six," Edwin said. "It's 7.12, or 7.14—I forget."

"Oh! That's near enough for Hilda," Janet smiled, looking at her watch.

"She doesn't mean any other train?" Mrs. Orgreave fearfully suggested.

"She can't mean any other train. There is no other. Only probably she's been looking at the wrong time-table," Janet reassured her mother.

"Because if the poor little thing found no one to meet him at Knype——"

"Don't worry, dear," said Janet. "The poor little thing would soon be engaging somebody's attention. Trust him!"

"But has she been writing to you lately?" Mrs. Orgreave questioned.

"No."

"Then why——"

"Don't ask *me*!" said Janet. "No doubt I shall get a letter to-morrow, after George has come and told us everything! Poor dear, I'm glad she's doing so much better now."

"Is she?" Edwin murmured, surprised.

"Oh yes!" said Janet. "She's got a regular bustling partner, and they're that busy they scarcely know what to do. But they only keep one little servant."

In the ordinary way Janet and Edwin never mentioned Hilda to one another. Each seemed to be held back by a kind of timid shame and by a cautious suspicion. Each seemed to be inquiring: "What does *he* know?" "What does *she* know?"

"If I thought it wasn't too cold, I'd go with you to Knype," said Mr. Orgreave.

"Now, Osmond!" Mrs. Orgreave sat up.

"Shall I go?" said Edwin.

"Well," said Janet, with much kindness, "I'm sure he'd be delighted to see *you*."

Mrs. Orgreave rang the bell.

"What do you want, mother?"

"There'll be the bed——"

"Don't you trouble with those things, dear," said Janet, very calmly. "There's heaps of time."

But Janet was just as excited as her parents. In two minutes the excitement had spread through the whole house, like a piquant and agreeable odour. The place was alive again.

"I'll just step across and ask Maggie to alter supper," said Edwin, "and then I'll call for you. I suppose we'll go down by train."

"I'm thankful he's had influenza," observed Mrs. Orgreave, implying that thus there would be less chance of George catching the disease under her infected roof.

That George had been down with influenza before Christmas was the sole information about him that Edwin obtained. Nobody appeared to consider it worth while to discuss the possible reasons for his sudden arrival. Hilda's caprices were accepted in that house like the visitations of heaven.

## VI

Edwin and Janet stood together on the windy and bleak down-platform of Knype Station, awaiting the express, which had been signalled. Edwin was undoubtedly very nervous and constrained, and it seemed to him that Janet's demeanour lacked naturalness.

"It's just occurred to me how she made that mistake about the time of the train," said Edwin, chiefly because he found the silence intolerably irksome. "It stops at Lichfield, and in running her eye across the page she must have mixed up the Lichfield figures with the Knype figures—you know how awkward it is in a time-table. As a matter of fact, the train *does* stop at Lichfield about 6.30."

"I see," said Janet reflectively.

And Edwin was saying to himself—

"It's a marvel to me how I can talk to her at all. What made me offer to come with her? How much does she know about me and Hilda? Hilda may have told her everything. If she's told her about her husband why shouldn't she have told her about me? And here we are both pretending that there's never been anything at all between me and Hilda!"

Then the train appeared, obscure round the curve, and bore down formidable and dark upon them, growing at every instant in stature and in noise until it deafened and seemed to fill the station; and the platform was suddenly in an uproar.

And almost opposite Janet and Edwin, leaning forth high above them from the door of a third-class carriage, the head and the shoulders of George Cannon were displayed in the gaslight. He seemed to dominate the train and the platform. At the windows on either side of him were adult faces, excited by his excitement, of the people who had doubtless been friendly to him during the journey. He distinguished Janet and Edwin almost at once, and shouted, and then waved.

"Hello, young son of a gun!" Edwin greeted him, trying to turn the handle of the door. But the door was locked, and it was necessary to call a porter, who tarried.

"I *made* mamma let me come!" George cried victoriously. "I told you I should!" He was far too agitated to think of shaking hands, and seemed to be in a state of fever. All his gestures were those of a proud hysterical conqueror, and like a

conqueror he gazed down at Edwin and Janet, who stood beneath him with upturned faces. He had absolutely forgotten the existence of his acquaintances in the carriage. "Did you know I've had the influenza? My temperature was up to 104 once—but it didn't stay long," he added regretfully.

When the door was at length opened, he jumped headlong, and Edwin caught him. He shook hands with Edwin and allowed Janet to kiss him.

"How hot you are!" Janet murmured.

The people in the compartment passed down his luggage, and after one of them had shouted good-bye to him twice, he remembered them, as it were by an effort, and replied, "Good-bye, good-bye," in a quick, impatient tone.

It was not until his anxious and assiduous foster-parents had bestowed him and his goods in the tranquillity of an empty compartment of the loop-line train that they began to appreciate the morbid unusualness of his condition. His eyes glittered with extraordinary brilliance. He talked incessantly, not listening to their answers. And his skin was burning hot.

"Why, whatever's the matter with you, my dear?" asked Janet, alarmed. "You're like an oven!"

"I'm thirsty," said George. "If I don't have something to drink soon, I don't know what I shall do."

Janet looked at Edwin.

"There won't be time to get something at the refreshment room?"

They both felt heavily responsible.

"I might——" Edwin said irresolutely.

But just then the guard whistled.

"Never mind!" Janet comforted the child. "In twenty minutes we shall be in the house. . . . No! you must keep your overcoat buttoned."

"How long have you been like that, George?" Edwin asked.

"You weren't like that when you started, surely?"

"No," said George judicially. "It came on in the train."

After this, he appeared to go to sleep.

"He's certainly not well," Janet whispered.

Edwin shrugged his shoulders. "Don't you think he's grown?" he observed.

"Oh yes!" said Janet. "It's astonishing isn't it, how children shoot up in a few weeks!"

They might have been parents exchanging notes, instead of celibates playing at parenthood for a hobby.

"Mamma says I've grown an inch." George opened his eyes. "She says it's about time I had! I dare say I shall be very tall. Are we nearly there?" His high, curt, febrile tones were really somewhat alarming.

When the train threw them out into the sodden waste that surrounds Bleakridge Station, George could scarcely stand. At any rate he showed no wish to stand. His protectors took him strongly by either arm, and thus bore him to Lane End House, with irregular unwilling assistance from his own feet. A porter followed with the luggage. It was an extremely distressing passage. Each protector in secret was imagining for George some terrible fever, of swift onslaught and fatal effect. At length they entered the garden, thanking their gods.

"He's not well," said Janet to her mother, who was fussily awaiting them in the hall. Her voice showed apprehension, and she was not at all convincing when she added: "But it's nothing serious. I shall put him straight to bed and let him eat there."

Instantly George became the centre of the house. The women disappeared with him, and Edwin had to recount the whole history of the arrival to Osmond Orgreave in the drawing-room. This recital was interrupted by Mrs. Orgreave.

"Mr. Edwin, Janet thinks if we sent for the doctor, just to be sure. As Johnnie isn't in, would you mind——"

"Stirling, I suppose?" said Edwin.

Stirling was the young Scottish doctor who had recently come into the town and taken it by storm.

When Edwin at last went home to a much-delayed meal, he was in a position to tell Maggie that young George Cannon had thought fit to catch influenza a second time in a couple of months. And Maggie, without a clear word, contrived to indicate that it was what she would have expected from a boy of George's violent temperament.



## CHAPTER X

### GEORGE AND THE VICAR

#### I

ON the Tuesday evening Edwin came home from business at six o'clock, and found that he was to eat alone. The servant anxiously explained that Miss Clayhanger had gone across to the Orgreaves' to assist Miss Orgreave. It was evident that before going Miss Clayhanger had inspired the servant with a full sense of the importance of Mr. Clayhanger's solitary meal, and of the terrible responsibility lying upon the person in charge of it. The girl was thrillingly alive ; she would have liked some friend or other of the house to be always seriously ill, so that Miss Clayhanger might often leave her to the voluptuous savouring of this responsibility whose formidableness surpassed words. Edwin, as he went upstairs and as he came down again, was conscious of her excited presence somewhere near him, half-visible in the warm gaslit house, spying upon him in order to divine the precise moment for the final service of the meal.

And in the dining-room the table was laid differently, so that he might be well situated, with regard to the light, for reading. And by the side of his plate were the newspaper, the magazines, and the book, among which Maggie had well guessed that he would make his choice for perusal. He was momentarily touched. He warmed his hands at the splendid fire, and then he warmed his back, watching the servant as with little flouncings and perkings she served, and he was touched by the placid and perfect efficiency of Maggie as a housekeeper. Maggie gave him something that no money could buy.

The servant departed and shut the door.

When he sat down he minutely changed the situation of nearly everything on the table, so that his magazine might be

lodged at exactly the right distance and angle, and so that each necessary object might be quite handy. He was in luxury, and he yielded himself to it absolutely. The sense that unusual events were happening, that the course of social existence was disturbed while his comfort was not disturbed, that danger hung cloudy on the horizon—this sense somehow intensified the appreciation of the hour, and positively contributed to his pleasure. Moreover, he was agreeably excited by a dismaying anticipation affecting himself alone.

## II

The door opened again, and Auntie Hamps was shown in by the servant. Before he could move the old lady had with overwhelming sweet supplications insisted that he should not move—no, not even to shake hands! He rose only to shake hands, and then fell back into his comfort. Auntie Hamps fixed a chair for herself opposite him, and drummed her black-gloved hands on the white table-cloth. She was steadily becoming stouter, and those chubby little hands seemed impossibly small against the vast mountain of fur which was crowned by her smirking crimson face and the supreme peak of her bonnet.

"They keep very friendly—those two," she remarked, with a strangely significant air, when he told her where Maggie was. She had shown no surprise at finding him alone, for the reason that she had already learnt everything from the servant in the hall.

"Janet and Maggie? They're friendly enough when they can be of use to each other."

"How *kind* Miss Janet was when your father was ill! I'm sure Maggie feels she must do all she can to return her kindness," Mrs. Hamps murmured, with emotion. "I shall always be grateful for her helpfulness! She's a grand girl, a grand girl!"

"Yes," said Edwin awkwardly.

"She's still waiting for you," said Mrs. Hamps, not archly, but sadly.

Edwin restively poohed. At the first instant of her arrival he had been rather glad to see her, for unusual events create a desire to discuss them; but if she meant to proceed in that

strain unuttered curses would soon begin to accumulate for her in his heart.

"I expect the kid must be pretty bad," he said.

"Yes," sighed Mrs. Hamps. "And probably poor Mrs. Orgreave is more in the way than anything else. And Mr. Orgreave only just out of bed, as you may say! . . . That young lady must have her hands full! My word! What a blessing it is she *has* made such friends with Maggie!"

Mrs. Hamps had the peculiar gift, which developed into ever-increasing perfection as her hair grew whiter, of being able to express ideas by means of words which had no relation to them at all. Within three minutes, by three different remarks whose occult message no stranger could have understood but which forced itself with unpleasant clearness upon Edwin, Mrs. Hamps had conveyed, "Janet Orgreave only cultivates Maggie because Maggie is the sister of Edwin Clayhanger."

"You're all very devoted to that child," she said, meaning, "There is something mysterious in that quarter which sooner or later is bound to come out." And the meaning was so clear that Edwin was intimidated. What did she guess? Did she know anything? To-night Auntie Hamps was displaying her gift at its highest.

"I don't know that Maggie's so desperately keen on the infant!" he said.

"She's not like you about him, that's sure!" Mrs. Hamps admitted. And she went on, in a tone that was only superficially casual, "I wonder the mother doesn't come down to him!"

Not 'his' mother—'the' mother. Odd, the effect of that trifle! Mrs. Hamps was a great artist in phrasing.

"Oh!" said Edwin. "It's not serious enough for that."

"Well, I'm not so sure," Auntie Hamps gravely replied. "*The Vicar is dead.*"

The emphasis which she put on these words was tremendous.

"Is he," Edwin stammered. "But what's that got to do with it?"

He tried to be condescending towards her absurdly superstitious assumption that the death of the Vicar of St. Peter's could increase the seriousness of George's case. And he feebly

succeeded in being condescending. Nevertheless he could not meet his auntie's gaze without self-consciousness. For her emphasis had been double, and he knew it. It had implied, secondly, that the death of the Vicar was an event specially affecting Edwin's household. The rough sketch of a romance between the Vicar and Maggie had never been completed into a picture, but on the other hand it had never been destroyed. The Vicar and Maggie had been supposed to be still interested in each other, despite the Vicar's priestliness, which latterly had perhaps grown more marked, just as his church had grown more ritualistic. It was a strange affair, thin, elusive ; but an affair it was. The Vicar and Maggie had seldom met of recent years, they had never—so far as anyone knew—met alone ; and yet, upon the news of the Vicar's death, the first thought of nearly everybody was for Maggie Clayhanger.

Mrs. Hamps's eyes, swimming in the satisfaction of several simultaneous woes, said plainly, " What about poor Maggie ? "

" When did you hear ? " Edwin asked. " It isn't in this afternoon's paper."

" I've only just heard. He died at four o'clock."

She had come up immediately with the news as fresh as orchard fruit.

" And the Duke of Clarence is no better," she said, in a luxurious sighing gloom. " And I'm afraid it's all over with Cardinal Manning." She made a peculiar noise in her throat, not quite a sigh ; rather a brave protest against the general fatality of things, stiffened by a determination to be strong though melancholy in misfortune.

### III

Maggie suddenly entered, hatted, with a jacket over her arm.

" Hello, auntie, you here ! "

They had already met that morning.

" I just called," said Mrs. Hamps guiltily. Edwin felt as though Maggie had surprised them both in some criminal act. They knew that Mr. Heve was dead. She did not know. She had to be told. He wished violently that Auntie Hamps had been elsewhere.

" Everything all right ? " Maggie asked Edwin, surveying the table. " I gave particular orders about the eggs."

"As right as rain," said Edwin, putting into his voice a note of true appreciation. He saw that her sense of duty towards him had brought her back to the house. She had taken every precaution to ensure his well-being, but she could not be content without seeing for herself that the servant had not betrayed the trust.

"How are things—across?" he inquired.

"Well," said Maggie, frowning, "that's one reason why I came back sooner than I meant. The doctor's just been. His temperature is getting higher and higher. I wish you'd go over as soon as you've finished. If you ask me, I think they ought to telegraph to his mother. But Janet doesn't seem to think so. Of course it's enough when Mrs. Orgreave begins worrying about telegraphing for Janet to say there's no need to telegraph. She's rather trying, Mrs. Orgreave is, I must admit. All that I've been doing is to keep her out of the bedroom. Janet has everything on her shoulders. Mr. Orgreave is just about as fidgety as Mrs. And of course the servants have their own work to do. Naturally Johnnie isn't in!" Her tone grew sarcastic and bitter.

"What does Stirling say about telegraphing?" Edwin demanded. He had intended to say 'telegraphing for Mrs. Cannon,' but he could not utter the last words; he could not compel his vocal organs to utter them. He became aware of the beating of his heart. For twenty-four hours he had been contemplating the possibility of a summons to Hilda. Now the possibility had developed into a probability. Nay, a certainty! Maggie was the very last person to be alarmist.

Maggie replied: "He says it might be as well to wait till to-morrow. But then, you know, he is like that—a bit."

"So they say," Auntie Hamps agreed.

"Have you seen the kid?" Edwin asked.

"About two minutes," said Maggie. "It's pitiable to watch him."

"Why? Is he in pain?"

"Not what you'd call pain. No! But he's so upset. Worried about himself. He's got a terrific fever on him. I'm certain he's delirious sometimes. Poor little thing!"

Tears gleamed in her eyes. The plight of the boy had



weakened her prejudices against him. Assuredly he was not 'rough' now.

Astounded and frightened by those shimmering tears, Edwin exclaimed, "You don't mean to say there's actual danger?"

"Well——" Maggie hesitated, and stopped.

There was silence for a moment. Edwin felt that the situation was now further intensified.

"I expect you've heard about the poor Vicar," Mrs. Hamps funereally insinuated. Edwin mutely damned her.

Maggie looked up sharply. "No! . . . He's not——"

Mrs. Hamps nodded twice.

The tears vanished from Maggie's eyes, forced backwards by all the secret pride that was in her. It was obvious that not the news of the Vicar had originally caused those tears; but nevertheless there should be no shadow of misunderstanding. The death of the Vicar must be associated with no more serious sign of distress in Maggie than in others. She must be above suspicion. For one acute moment, as he read her thoughts and as the profound sacrificial tragedy of her entire existence loomed less indistinctly than usual before him, Edwin ceased to think about himself and Hilda.

She made a quick hysterical movement.

"I wish you'd go across, Edwin," she said harshly.

"I'll go now," he answered, with softness. And he was glad to go.

#### IV

It was Osmond Orgreave who opened to him the front door of Lane End House. Maggie had told the old gentleman that she should send Edwin over, and he was wandering vaguely about in nervous expectation. In an instant they were discussing George's case, and the advisability of telegraphing to Hilda. Mrs. Orgreave immediately joined them in the hall. Both father and mother clearly stood in awe of the gentle but powerful Janet. And somehow the child was considered as her private affair, into which others might not thrust themselves save on sufferance. Perceiving that Edwin was slightly inclined to the course of telegraphing, they drew him towards them as a reinforcement, but while Mrs. Orgreave frankly

displayed her dependence on him, Mr. Orgreave affected to be strong, independent, and judicial.

"I wish you'd go and speak to her," Mrs. Orgreave entreated.

"Upstairs?"

"It won't do any harm, anyhow," said Osmond, finely indifferent.

They went up the stairs in a procession. Edwin did not wish to tell them about the Vicar. He could see no sense in telling them about the Vicar. And yet, before they reached the top of the stairs, he heard himself saying in a concerned whisper—

"You know about the Vicar of St. Peter's?"

"No."

"Died at four o'clock."

"Oh dear me! Dear me!" murmured Mrs. Orgreave, agonized.

Most evidently George's case was aggravated by the Vicar's death—and not only in the eyes of Mrs. Orgreave and her falsely stoic husband, but in Edwin's eyes too! Useless for him to argue with himself about idiotic superstitiousness! The death of the Vicar had undoubtedly influenced his attitude towards George.

They halted on the landing, outside a door that was ajar. Near them burned a gas-jet, and beneath the bracket was a large framed photograph of the bridal party at Alicia's wedding. Farther along the landing were other similar records of the weddings of Marian, Tom and Jimmie.

Mr. Orgreave pushed the door half open.

"Janet," said Mr. Orgreave conspiratorially.

"Well?" from within the bedroom.

"Here's Edwin."

Janet appeared in the doorway, pale. She was wearing an apron with a bib.

"I—I thought I'd just look in and inquire," Edwin said awkwardly, fiddling with his hat and a pocket of his overcoat.

"What's he like now?"

Janet gave details. The sick-room lay hidden behind the face of the door, mysterious and sacred.

"Mr. Edwin thinks you ought to telegraph," said Mrs. Orgreave timidly.

"Do you?" demanded Janet. Her eyes seemed to pierce him. Why did she gaze at him with such particularity, as though he possessed a special interest in Hilda?

"Well——" he muttered. "You might just wire how things are, and leave it to her to come as she thinks fit."

"Just so," said Mr. Orgreave quickly, as if Edwin had expressed his own thought.

"But the telegram couldn't be delivered to-night," Janet objected. "It's nearly half-past seven now."

It was true. Yet Edwin was more than ever conscious of a keen desire to telegraph at once.

"But it would be delivered first thing in the morning," he said. "So that she'd have more time to make arrangements if she wanted to."

"Well, if you think like that," Janet acquiesced.

The visage of Mrs. Orgreave lightened.

"I'll run down and telegraph myself, if you like," said Edwin. "Of course you've written to her. She knows——"

"Oh yes!"

V

In a minute he was walking rapidly, with his ungainly, slouching stride, down Trafalgar Road, his overcoat flying loose. Another crisis was approaching, he thought. As he came to Duck Square, he met a newspaper boy shouting shrilly and wearing the contents bill of a special edition of the "Signal" as an apron: "Duke of Clarence. More serious bulletin." The scourge and fear of influenza was upon the town, upon the community, tangible, oppressive, tragic.

In the evening calm of the shabby, gloomy post office, holding a stubby pencil that was chained by a cable to the wall, he stood over a blank telegraph form, hesitating how to word the message. Behind the counter an instrument was ticking unheeded, and far within could be discerned the vague bodies of men dealing with parcels. He wrote, "Cannon, 59, Preston Street, Brighton. George's temperature 104." Then he paused, and added, "Edwin." It was sentimental. He ought to have signed Janet's name. And, if he was determined to make the telegram personal, he might at least have put his surname. He knew it was sentimental, and he

loathed sentimentality. But that evening he wanted to be sentimental.

He crossed to the counter, and pushed the form under the wire-netting.

A sleepy girl accepted it, and glanced mechanically at the clock, and then wrote the hour 7.42.

"It won't be delivered to-night," she said, looking up, as she counted the words.

"No, I know," said Edwin.

"Sixpence, please."

As he paid the sixpence he felt as though he had accomplished some great, critical, agitating deed. And his heart asserted itself again, thunderously beating.

## CHAPTER XI

### BEGINNING OF THE NIGHT

#### I

THE next day was full of strange suspense ; it was coloured throughout with that quality of strangeness which puts a new light on all quotidian occupations and exposes their fundamental unimportance. Edwin arose to the fact that a thick grey fog was wrapping the town. When he returned home to breakfast at nine the fog was certainly more opaque than it had been an hour earlier. The steam-cars passed like phantoms, with a continuous clanging of bells. He breakfasted under gas—and alone. Maggie was invisible, or only to be seen momentarily, flying across the domestic horizon. She gave out that she was very busy in the attics, cleaning those shockingly neglected rooms. " Please, sir," said the servant, " Miss Clayhanger says she's been across to Mr. Orgreave's, and Master George is about the same." Maggie would not come and tell him herself. On the previous evening he had not seen her after the reception of the news about the Vicar. She had gone upstairs when he came back from the post office. Beyond doubt, she was too disturbed, emotionally, to be able to face him with her customary tranquillity. She was getting over the shock with brush and duster up in the attics. He was glad that she had not attempted to be as usual. The ordeal of attempting to be as usual would have tried him perhaps as severely as her.

He went forth again into the fog in a high state of agitation, constricted with sympathetic distress on Maggie's account, apprehensive for the boy, and painfully expectant of the end of the day. The whole day slipped away so, hour after monotonous hour, while people talked about influenza and about distinguished patients, and doctors hurried from house to house, and the fog itself seemed to be the visible mantle of



the disease. And the end of the day brought nothing to Edwin save an acuter expectancy. George varied; on the whole he was worse; not much worse, but worse. Dr. Stirling saw him twice. No message arrived from Hilda, nor did she come in person. Maggie watched George for five hours in the late afternoon and evening, while Janet rested.

At eight o'clock, when there was no further hope of a telegram from Hilda, everybody pretended to concur in the view that Hilda, knowing her boy better than anybody else, and having already seen him through an attack of influenza, had not been unduly alarmed by the telegraphic news of his temperature, and was content to write. She might probably be arranging to come on the morrow. After all, George's temperature had reached 104 in the previous attack. Then there was the fog. The fog would account for anything.

Nevertheless, nobody was really satisfied by these explanations of Hilda's silence and absence. In every heart lay the secret and sinister thought of the queerness and the incalculableness of Hilda.

Edwin called several times on the Orgreaves. He finally left their house about ten o'clock, with some difficulty tracing his way home from gas-lamp to gas-lamp through the fog. Mr. Orgreave himself had escorted him with a lantern round the wilderness of the lawn to the gates. "We shall have a letter in the morning," Mr. Orgreave had said. "Bound to!" Edwin had replied. And they had both superiorly puffed away into the fog the absurd misgivings of women.

Knowing that he was in no condition to sleep, Edwin mended the drawing-room fire, and settled down on the sofa to read. But he could no more read than sleep. He seemed to lie on the sofa for hours while his thoughts jiggled with fatiguing monotony in his head. He was extraordinarily wakeful and alive, every sense painfully sharpened. At last he decided to go to bed. In his bedroom he gazed idly out at the blank density of the fog. And then his heart leapt as his eye distinguished a moving glimmer below in the garden of the Orgreaves. He threw up the window in a tumult of anticipation. The air was absolutely still. Then he heard a voice say, "Good night." It was undoubtedly Dr. Stirling's voice. The Scotch accent was unmistakable. Was the boy

worse? Not necessarily, for the doctor had said that he might look in again 'last thing,' if chance favoured. And the Scotch significance of 'last thing' was notoriously comprehensive; it might include regions beyond midnight. Then Edwin heard another voice: "Thanks ever so much!" At first it puzzled him. He knew it, and yet——! Could it be the Sunday's voice? Assuredly it was not the voice of Mr. Orgreave, nor of anyone living in the house. It reminded him of the Sunday's voice.

He went out of his bedroom, striking a match, and going downstairs lit the gas in the hall, which he had just extinguished. Then he put on a cap, found a candlestick in the kitchen, unbolted the garden door as quietly as he could, and passed into the garden. The flame of the candle stood upright in the fog. He blundered along to the dividing wall, placed the candle on the top of it, and managed to climb over. Leaving the candle on the wall to guide his return, he approached the house, which showed gleams at several windows, and rang the bell. And in fact it was Charlie Orgreave himself who opened the door. And a lantern, stuck carelessly on the edge of a chair, was still burning in the hall.

## II

In a moment he had learnt the chief facts. Hilda had gone up to London, dragged Charlie out of Ealing, and brought him down with her to watch over her child. Once more she had done something which nobody could have foreseen. The train—not the London express, but the loop—was late. The pair had arrived about half-past ten, and a little later Dr. Stirling had fulfilled his promise to look in if he could. The two doctors had conferred across the child's bed, and had found themselves substantially in agreement. Moreover, the child was if anything somewhat better. The Scotsman had gone. Charles and Hilda had eaten. Hilda meant to sit up, and had insisted that Janet should go to bed; it appeared that Janet had rested but not slept in the afternoon.

Charlie took Edwin into the small breakfast-room, where Osmond Orgreave was waiting, and the three men continued to discuss the situation. They were all of them too excited to sit down, though Osmond and—in a less degree—Charlie

affected the tranquillity of high philosophers. At first Edwin knew scarcely what he did. His speech and gestures were not the result of conscious volition. He seemed suddenly to have two individualities, and the new one, which was the more intimate one, watched the other as in a dim-lighted dream. . . . She was there in a room above! She had come in response to the telegram signed 'Edwin'! Last night she was far away. To-night she was in the very house with him. Miracle! He asked himself: "Why should I get myself into this state simply because she is here? It would have been mighty strange if she had not come. I must take myself in hand better than this. I mustn't behave like a blooming girl." He frowned and coughed.

"Well," said Osmond Orgreave to his son, thrusting out his coat-tails with his hands towards the fire, and swaying slightly to and fro on his heels and toes, "so you've had your consultation, you eminent specialists! What's the result?"

He looked at his elegant son with an air half-quizzical and half-deferential.

"I've told you he's evidently a little better, dad," Charlie answered casually. His London deportment was more marked than ever. The bracingly correct atmosphere of Ealing had given him a rather obvious sense of importance. He had developed into a man with a stake in the country, and he twisted his moustache like such a man, and took out a cigarette like such a man.

"Yes, I know," said Osmond, with controlled impatience. "But what sort of influenza is it? I'm hoping to learn something now you've come. Stirling will talk about anything except influenza."

"What sort of influenza is it? What do you mean?" And Charlie's twinkling glance said condescendingly: "What's the old cock got hold of now? This is just like him."

"But is there any real danger?" Edwin murmured.

"Well," said Osmond, bringing up his regiments, "as I understand it, there are three types of influenza—the respiratory, the gastro-intestinal, and the nervous. Which one is it?"

Charlie laughed, and prodded his father with a forefinger

in a soft region near the shoulder, disturbing his balance. "You've been reading the 'B.M.J.,' " he said, "and so you needn't pretend you haven't!"

Osmond paused an instant to consider the meaning of these initials.

"What if I have?" he demanded, raising his eyebrows, "I say there are three types——"

"Thirty; you might be nearer the mark with thirty," Charlie interrupted him. "The fact is that this division into types is all very well in theory," he proceeded, with easy disdain. "But in practice it won't work out. Now for instance, what this kid has won't square with any of your three types. It's purely febrile, that's what it is. Rare, decidedly rare, but less rare in children than in adults—at any rate in my experience—in my experience. If his temperature wasn't so high, I should say the thing might last for days—weeks even. I've know it. The first question I put was—has he been in a stupor? He had. It may recur. That, and headache, *and* the absence of localized nervous symptoms——" He stopped, leaving the sentence in the air, grandiose and formidable, but of no purport.

Charlie shrugged his shoulders, allowing the beholder to choose his own interpretation of the gesture.

"You're a devilish wonderful fellow," said Osmond grimly to his son. And Charlie winked grimly at Edwin, who grimly smiled.

"You and your 'British Medical Journal'!" Charlie exclaimed, with an irony from which filial affection was not absent, and again prodded his father in the same spot.

"Of course I know I'm an old man," said Osmond, condescendingly rejecting Charlie's condescension. He thought he did not mean what he said; nevertheless, it was the expression of the one idea which latterly beyond all other ideas had possessed him.

### III

Janet came into the room, and was surprised to see Edwin. She was in a state of extreme fatigue—pale, with burning eyes, and hair that has lost the gracefulness of its curves.

"So you know?" she said.

Edwin nodded.

"It seems I've got to go to bed," she went on. "Father, you must go to bed too. Mother's gone. It's frightfully late. Come along now!"

She was insistent. She had been worried during the greater part of the day by her restless parents, and she was determined not to leave either of them at large.

"Charlie, you might run upstairs and see that everything's all right before I go. I shall get up again at four."

"I'll be off," said Edwin.

"Here! Hold on a bit," Charlie objected. "Wait till I come down. Let's have a yarn. You don't want to go to bed yet."

Edwin agreed to the suggestion, and was left alone in the breakfast-room. What struck him was that the new situation created by Hilda's strange caprice had instantly been accepted by everybody, and had indeed already begun to seem quite natural. He esteemed highly the demeanour of all the Or-greaves. Neither he himself nor Maggie could have surpassed them in their determination not to exaggerate the crisis, in their determination to bear themselves simply and easily, and to speak with lightness, even with occasional humour. There were few qualities that he admired more than this.

And what was her demeanour, up there in the bedroom?

Suddenly the strangeness of Hilda's caprice presented itself to him as even more strange. She had merely gone to Ealing and captured Charlie. Charlie was understood to have a considerable practice. At her whim all his patients had been abandoned. What an idea, to bring him down like this! What tremendous faith in him she must have! And Edwin remembered distinctly that the first person who had ever spoken to him of Hilda was Charlie! And in what terms of admiration! Was there a long and secret understanding between these two? They must assuredly be far more intimate than he had ever suspected. Edwin hated to think that Hilda would depend more upon Charlie than upon himself in a grave difficulty. The notion caused him acute discomfort. He was resentful against Charlie as against a thief who had robbed him of his own, but who could not be apprehended and put to shame.



The acute discomfort was jealousy ; but this word did not occur to him.

## IV

" I say," Edwin began, in a new intimate tone, when after what seemed a very long interval Charlie Orgreave returned to the breakfast-room with the information that for the present all had been done that could be done.

" What's up ? " said Charlie, responding quite eagerly to the appeal for intimacy in Edwin's voice. He had brought in a tray with whisky and its apparatus, and he set this handily on a stool in front of the fire, and poked the fire, and generally made the usual ritualistic preparations for a comfortable talkative night.

" Rather delicate, wasn't it, you coming down and taking Stirling's case off him ? "

Edwin smiled idly as he lolled far back in an old easy chair. His two individualities had now merged again into one.

" My boy," Charlie answered, pausing impressively with his curly head held forward, before dropping into an arm-chair by the stool, " you may take it from me that ' delicate ' is not the word ! "

Edwin nodded sympathetically, perceiving with satisfaction that beneath his Metropolitan mannerism, and his amusing pomposities, and his perfectly dandiacal clothes, Charlie still remained the Sunday, possibly more naïve than ever. This *naïveté* of Charlie's was particularly pleasing to him, for the reason that it gave him a feeling of superiority to the more brilliant being and persuaded him that the difference between London and the provinces was inessential and negligible. Charlie's hair still curled like a boy's, and he had not outgrown the *naïveté* of boyhood. Against these facts the fact that Charlie was a partner in a fashionable and dashing practice at Ealing simply did not weigh. The deference which in thought Edwin had been slowly acquiring for this Charlie, as to whom impressive news reached Bursley from time to time, melted almost completely away. In fundamentals he was convinced that Charlie was an infant compared to himself.

" Have a drop ? "

"Well, it's not often I do, but I will to-night. Steady on with the whisky, old chap."

Each took a charged glass and sipped. Edwin, by raising his arm, could just lodge his glass on the mantelpiece. Charlie then opened his large gun-metal cigarette-case, and one match lighted two cigarettes.

"Yes, my boy," Charlie resumed, as he meditatively blew out the match and threw it on the fire, "you may well say 'delicate.' The truth is that if I hadn't seen at once that Stirling was a very decent sort of chap, and very friendly here, I might have funk'd it. Yes, I might. He came in just after we'd arrived. So I saw him alone—here. I made a clean breast of it, and put myself in his hands. Of course he appreciated the situation at once; and considering he'd never seen *her*, it was rather clever of him. . . . I suppose people rather like that Scotch accent of his, down here?"

"They say he makes over a thousand a year already," Edwin replied. He was thinking. "Is she likely to be coming downstairs? No."

"The deuce he does!" Charlie murmured, with ingenuous animation, foolishly betraying by an instant's lack of self-control the fact that Ealing was not Utopia. Envy was in his voice as he continued: "It's astonishing how some chaps can come along and walk straight into anything they want—whatever it happens to be!"

"What do you think of him as a doctor?" Edwin questioned.

"Seems all right," said Charlie, with a fine brief effort to be patronizing.

"He's got a great reputation down here," Edwin said quietly.

"Yes, yes. I should say he's quite all right."

V

"How came it that Mrs. Cannon came and rummaged *you* out?" Edwin knew that he would blush, and so he reached up for his whisky, and drank, adding: "The old man still clings to his old brand of Scotch."

"My dear fellow, I know no more than you. I was perfectly staggered—I can tell you that. I hadn't seen her

since before she was married. Only heard of her again just lately through Janet. I suppose it was Janet who told her I was at Ealing. It's an absolute fact that just at the first blush I didn't even recognize her."

"Didn't you?" Edwin wondered how this could be.

"I did not. She came into our surgery, as if she'd come out of the next room and I'd seen her only yesterday, and she just asked me to come away with her at once to Bursley. I thought she was off her nut, but she wasn't. She showed me your telegram."

"The dickens she did!" Edwin was really startled.

"Yes. I told her there was nothing absolutely fatal in a temperature of 104. It happened in thousands of cases. Then she explained to me exactly how he'd been ill before, seemingly in the same way, and I could judge from what she said that he wasn't a boy who would stand a high temperature for very long."

"By the way, what's his temperature to-night?" Edwin interrupted.

"102 point 7," said Charlie. "Yes," he resumed, "she did convince me it might be serious. But what then? I told her I couldn't possibly leave. She asked me why not. She kept on asking me why not. I said, What about my patients here? She asked if any of them were dying. I said no, but I couldn't leave them all to my partner. I don't think she realized, before that, that I was in partnership. She stuck to it worse than ever then. I asked her why she wanted just me. I said all we doctors were much about the same, and so on. But it was no use. The fact is, you know, Hilda always had a great notion of me as a doctor. Can't imagine why! Kept it to herself of course, jolly close, as she did most things, but I'd noticed it now and then. You know—one of those tremendous beliefs she has. You're another of her beliefs, if you want to know."

"How do you know? Give us another cigarette." Edwin was exceedingly uneasy, and yet joyous. One of his fears was that the Sunday might inquire how it was that he signed telegrams to Hilda with only his Christian name. The Sunday, however, made no such inquiry.

"How do I know!" Charlie exclaimed. "I could tell in a

second by the way she showed me your telegram. Oh! And besides, that's an old story, my young friend. You needn't flatter yourself it wasn't common property at one time."

"Oh! Rot!" Edwin muttered. "Well, go on!"

"Well, then I explained that there was such a thing as medical etiquette. . . . Ah! you should have heard Hilda on medical etiquette. You should just have heard her on that lay—medical etiquette versus the dying child. I simply had to chuck that. I said to her, 'But suppose you hadn't caught me at home? I might have been out for the day—a hundred things.' It was sheer accident she had caught me. At last she said: 'Look here, Charlie, will you come, or won't you?'"

## VI

"Well, and what did you say?"

"I should tell you she went down on her knees. What should you have said, eh, my boy? What could I say? They've got you when they put it that way. Especially a woman like she is! I tell you she was simply terrific. I tell you I wouldn't go through it again—not for something."

Edwin responsively shook.

"I just threw up the sponge and came. I told Huskisson a thundering lie, to save my face, and away I came, and I've been with her ever since. Dashed if I haven't!"

"Who's Huskisson?"

"My partner. If anybody had told me beforehand that I should do such a thing I should have laughed. Of course, if you look at it calmly, it's preposterous. Preposterous—there's no other word—from my point of view. But when they begin to put it the way she put it—well, you've got to decide quick whether you'll be sensible and a brute, or whether you'll sacrifice yourself and be a damned fool. . . . What good am I here? No more good than anybody else. Supposing there *is* danger? Well, there may be. But I've left twenty or thirty influenza cases at Ealing. Every influenza case is dangerous, if it comes to that."

"Exactly," breathed Edwin.

"I wouldn't have done it for any other woman," Charlie recommenced. "Not much!"

"Then why did you do it for her?"

Charlie shrugged his shoulders. "There's something about her . . . I don't know. . . ." He lifted his nostrils fastidiously and gazed at the fire. "There's not many women knocking about like *her*. . . . She gets hold of you. She's nothing at all for about six months at a stretch, and then she has one minute of the grand style. . . . That's the sort of woman she is. Understand? But I expect you don't know her as we do."

"Oh yes, I understand," said Edwin. "She must be tremendously fond of the kid."

"You bet she is! Absolute passion. What sort is he?"

"Oh! He's all right. But I've never seen them together, and I never thought she was so particularly keen on him."

"Don't you make any mistake," said Charlie loftily. "I believe women often are like that about an only child when they've had a rough time. And by the look of her she must have had a pretty rough time. I've never made out why she married that swine, and I don't think anyone else has either."

"Did you know him?" Edwin asked, with sudden eagerness.

"Not a bit. But I've sort of understood he was a regular outsider. Do you know how long she's been a widow?"

"No," said Edwin. "I've barely seen her."

At these words he became so constrained, and so suspicious of the look on his own face, that he rose abruptly and began to walk about the room.

"What's the matter?" demanded Charlie. "Got pins and needles?"

"Only fidgets," said Edwin.

"I hope this isn't one of your preliminaries for clearing out and leaving me alone," Charlie complained. "Here—where's that glass of yours? Have another cigarette."

There was a sound that seemed to resemble a tap on the door.

"What's that noise?" said Edwin, startled. The whole of his epidermis tingled, and he stood still. They both listened.

The sound was repeated. Yes, it was a tap on the door; but in the night, and in the repose of the house, it had the character of some unearthly summons.



Edwin was near the door. He hesitated for an instant, afraid, and then with an effort brusquely opened the door and looked forth beyond the shelter of the room. A woman's figure was disappearing down the passage in the direction of the stairs. It was she.

"Did you——" he began. But Hilda had gone. Agitated, he said to Charlie, his hand still on the knob: "It's Mrs. Cannon. She just knocked and ran off. I expect she wants you."

Charlie jumped up and scurried out of the room exactly like a boy, despite his tall, mature figure of a man of thirty-five.

## CHAPTER XII

### END OF THE NIGHT

#### I

FOR the second time that night Edwin was left alone for a long period in the little breakfast-room. Charlie's phrase, 'You're another of her beliefs,' shone like a lamp in his memory, beneficent. And though he was still jealous of Charlie, with whom Hilda's relations were obviously very intimate; although he said to himself, 'She never made any appeal to *me*, she would scarcely have *my* help at any price'; nevertheless he felt most singularly uplifted and, without any reason, hopeful. So much so that the fate of the child became with him a matter of secondary importance. He excused this apparent callousness by making sure in his own mind that the child was in no real danger. On the other hand, he blamed himself for ever having fancied that Hilda was indifferent to George. She, indifferent to her own son! What a wretched, stupid slander! He ought to have known better than that. He ought to have known that a Hilda would bring to maternity the mightiest passions. All that Charlie had said confirmed him in his idolization of her. 'One minute of the grand style.' That was it. Charlie had judged her very well—damn him! And the one minute was priceless, beyond all estimation.

The fire sank, with little sounds of decay; and he stared at it, prevented as if by a spell from stooping to make it up, prevented even from looking at his watch. At length he shivered slightly, and the movement broke the trance. He wandered to the door, which Charlie had left ajar, and listened. No sign of life! He listened intently, but his ear could catch nothing whatever. What were those two doing upstairs with the boy? Cautiously he stepped out into the passage,

and went to the foot of the stairs, where a gas-jet was burning. He was reminded of the nights preceding his father's death.

Another gas-jet showed along the corridor at the head of the stairs. He put his foot on the first step ; it creaked with a noise comparable to the report of a pistol in the dead silence. But there was no responsive sound to show that anyone had been alarmed by this explosion. Impelled by nervous curiosity, and growing careless, he climbed the reverberating, complaining stairs, and, entering the corridor, stood exactly in front of the closed door of the sick-room, and listened again, and heard naught. His heart was obstreperously beating. Part of the household slept ; the other part watched ; and he was between the two, like a thief, like a spy. Should he knock, discreetly, and ask if he could be of help ? The strange romance of his existence, and of all existence, flowed around him in mysterious currents, obsessing him.

Suddenly the door opened, and Charlie, barely avoiding a collision, started back in alarm. Then Charlie recovered his self-possession and carefully shut the door.

" I was just wondering whether I could be any use," Edwin stammered in a whisper.

Charlie whispered : " It's all right, but I must run round to Stirling's, and get a drug I want."

" Is he worse ? "

" Yes. That is—yes. You never know with a child. They're up and down and all over the place inside of an hour."

" Can I go ? " Edwin suggested.

" No. I can explain to him quicker than you."

" You'll never find your way in this fog."

" Bosh, man ! D'you think I don't know the town as well as you ? Besides, it's lifted considerably."

By a common impulse they tiptoed to the window at the end of the corridor. Across the lawn could be dimly discerned a gleam through the trees.

" I'll come with you," said Edwin.

" You'd much better stay here—in case."

" Shall I go into the bedroom ? "

“Certainly.”

Charlie turned to descend the stairs.

“I say,” Edwin called after him in a loud whisper, “when you get to the gate—you know the house—you go up the side entry. The night bell’s rather high up on the left hand.”

“All right! All right!” Charlie replied impatiently. “Just come and shut the front door after me. I don’t want to bang it.”

## II

When Edwin crept into the bedroom he was so perturbed by continually growing excitement that he saw nothing clearly except the central group of objects: that is to say, a narrow bed, whose burden was screened from him by its foot, a table, an empty chair, the gas-globe luminous against a dark-green blind, and Hilda in black, alert and erect beneath the down-flowing light. The rest of the chamber seemed to stretch obscurely away into no confines. Not for several seconds did he even notice the fire. This confusing excitement was not caused by anything external such as the real or supposed peril of the child; it had its source within.

As soon as Hilda identified him her expression changed from the intent frowning stare of inquiry to a smile. Edwin had never before seen her smile in that way. The smile was weak, resigned, almost piteous; and it was extraordinarily sweet. He closed the door quietly, and moved in silence towards the bed. She nodded an affectionate welcome. He returned her greeting eagerly, and all his constraint was loosed away, and he felt at ease, and happy. Her face was very pale indeed against the glittering blackness of her eyes, and her sombre disordered hair and untidy dress; but it did not show fatigue nor extreme anxiety; it was a face of calm meekness. The sleeves of her dress were reversed, showing the forearms, which gave her an appearance of *deshabille*, homely, intimate, confiding. “So it was common property at one time,” Edwin thought, recalling a phrase of Charlie’s in the breakfast-room. Strange: he wanted her in all her disarray, with all her woes, anxieties, solitudes; he wanted her, piteous, meek, beaten by destiny, weakly smiling; he

wanted her because she stood so, after the immense, masterful effort of the day, watching in acquiescence by that bed !

"Has he gone ?" she asked, in a voice ordinarily loud, but, for her, unusually tender.

"Yes," said Edwin. "He's gone. He told me I'd better come in here. So I came."

She nodded again. "Have that chair."

Without arguing, he took the chair. She remained standing.

The condition of George startled him. Evidently the boy was in a heavy stupor. His body was so feverish that it seemed to give off a perceptible heat. There was no need to touch the skin in order to know that it burned : one divined this. The hair was damp. About the pale lips an irregular rash had formed, purplish, patchy, and the rash seemed to be the mark and sign of some strange dreadful disease that nobody had ever named : a plague. Worse than all this was the profound, comprehensive discomfort of the whole organism, showing itself in the unnatural pose of the limbs, and in multitudinous faint instinctive ways of the inert but complaining body. And the child was so slight beneath the blanket, so young, so helpless, spiritually so alone. How could even Hilda communicate her sympathy to that spirit, withdrawn and inaccessible ? During the illness of his father Edwin had thought that he was looking upon the extreme tragic limit of pathos, but this present spectacle tightened more painfully the heart. It was more shameful : a more excruciating accusation against the order of the universe. To think of George in his pride, strong, capricious, and dominant, while gazing at this victim of malady . . . the contrast was intolerable !

George was very ill. And yet Hilda, despite the violence of her nature, could stand there calm, sweet, and controlled. What power ! Edwin was humbled. "This is the sort of thing that women of her sort can do," he said to himself. "Why, Maggie and I are simply nothing to her !" Maggie and he could be self-possessed in a crisis ; they could stand a strain ; but the strain would show itself either in a tense harshness, or in some unnatural lightness, or even flippancy.



Hilda was the very image of soft caressing sweetness. He felt that he must emulate her.

"Surely his temperature's gone up?" he said quietly.

"Yes," Hilda replied, fingering absently the clinical thermometer that with a lot of other gear lay on the table. "It's nearly 105. It can't last like this. It won't. I've been through it with him before, but not quite so bad."

"I didn't think anyone could have influenza twice, so soon," Edwin murmured.

"Neither did I," said she. "Still, he must have been sickening for it before he came down here." There was a pause. She wiped the boy's forehead. "This change has come on quite suddenly," she said, in a different voice. "Two hours ago—less than two hours ago—there was scarcely a sign of that rash."

"What is it?"

"Charlie says it's nothing particular."

"What's Charlie gone for?"

"I don't know." She shook her head; then smiled.

"Isn't it a good thing I brought him?"

Indubitably it was. Her caprice, characterized as preposterous by males, had been justified. Thus chance often justifies women, setting at naught the high priests of reason.

### III

Looking at the unconscious and yet tormented child, Edwin was aware of a melting protective pity for him, of an immense desire to watch over his rearing with all insight, sympathy, and help, so that in George's case none of the mistakes and cruelties and misapprehensions should occur which had occurred in his own. This feeling was intense to the point of being painful.

"I don't know whether you know or not," he said, "but we're great pals, the infant and I."

Hilda smiled, and in the very instant of seeing the smile its effect upon him was such that he humiliated himself before her in secret for ever having wildly suspected that she was jealous of the attachment. "Do you think I don't know all about that?" she murmured. "He wouldn't be here now if

it hadn't been for that." After a silence she added : " You're the only person that he ever has really cared for, and I can tell you he likes you better than he likes me."

" How do you know that ? "

" I know by the way he talks and looks."

" If he takes after his mother, that's no sign," Edwin retorted, without considering what he said.

" What do you mean—' if he takes after his mother ' ? " She seemed puzzled.

" Could anyone tell *your* real preferences from the way *you* talked and looked ? " His audacious rashness astounded him. Nevertheless he stared her in the eyes, and her glance fell.

" No one but you could have said a thing like that," she observed mildly, yieldingly.

And what he had said suddenly acquired a mysterious and wise significance and became oracular. She alone had the power of inspiring him to be profound. He had noticed that before, years ago, and first at their first meeting. Or was it that she saw in him an oracle, and caused him to see with her ?

Slowly her face coloured, and she walked away to the fire-place, and cautiously tended it. Constraint had seized him again, and his heart was loud.

" Edwin," she summoned him, from the fire-place.

He rose, shaking with emotion, and crossed the undiscovered spaces of the room to where she was. He had the illusion that they were by themselves not in the room but in the universe. She was leaning with one hand on the mantel-piece.

" I must tell you something," she said, " that nobody at all knows except George's father, and probably nobody ever will know. His sister knew, but she's dead."

" Yes ! " he muttered, in an exquisite rush of happiness. After all, it was not with Charlie, nor even with Janet that she was most intimate ; it was with himself !

" George's father was put in prison for bigamy. George is illegitimate." She spoke with her characteristic extreme clearness of enunciation, in a voice that showed no emotion.

"You don't mean it!" He gasped foolishly.

She nodded. "I'm not a married woman. I once thought I was, but I wasn't. That's all."

"But——"

"But what?"

"You—you said six or seven years, didn't you? Surely they don't give that long for bigamy?"

"Oh!" she replied mildly. "That was for something else. When he came out of prison the first time they arrested him again instantly—so I was told. It was in Scotland."

"I see."

There was a rattle as of hailstones on the window. They both started.

"That must be Charlie!" she exclaimed, suddenly loosing her excitement under this pretext. "He doesn't want to ring and wake the house."

Edwin ran out of the room, sliding and slipping down the deserted stairs that waited patiently through the night for human feet.

"Forgot to take a key," said Charlie, appearing, breathless, just as the door opened. "I meant to take the big key, and then I forgot." He had a little round box in his hand. He mounted the stairs two and three at a time.

Edwin slowly closed the door. He could not bring himself to follow Charlie and, after a moment's vacillation, he went back into the breakfast-room.

#### IV

Amazing, incalculable woman, wrapped within fold after fold of mystery! He understood better now, but even now there were things that he did not understand; and the greatest enigma of all remained unsolved, the original enigma of her treachery to himself. . . . And she had chosen just that moment, just that crisis, to reveal to him that sinister secret which by some unguessed means she had been able to hide from her acquaintance. Naturally, if she wished to succeed with a boarding-house in Brighton she would be compelled to conceal somehow the fact that she was the victim of a bigamist and her child without a lawful name! The merest prudence would urge her to concealment so long as conceal-

ment was possible ; yes, even from Janet ! Her other friends deemed her a widow ; Janet thought her the wife of a convict ; he alone knew that she was neither wife nor widow. Through what scathing experience she must have passed ! An unfamiliar and disconcerting mood gradually took complete possession of him. At first he did not correctly analyse it. It was sheer, exuberant, instinctive, unreasoning, careless joy.

Then, after a long period of beatific solitude in the breakfast-room, he heard stealthy noises in the hall, and his fancy jumped to the idea of burglary. Excited, unreflecting, he hurried into the hall. Johnnie Orgreave, who had let himself in with a latchkey, was shutting and bolting the front door. Johnnie's surprise was the greater. He started violently on seeing Edwin, and then at once assumed the sang-froid of a hero of romance. When Edwin informed him that Hilda had come, and Charlie with her, and that those two were watching by the boy, the rest of the household being in bed, Johnnie permitted himself a few verbal symptoms of astonishment.

"How is Georgie ?" he asked with an effort, as if ashamed.

"He isn't much better," said Edwin evasively.

Johnnie made a deprecatory sound with his tongue against his lips, and frowned, determined to take his proper share in the general anxiety.

With careful, dignified movements, he removed his silk hat and his heavy ulster, revealing evening-dress, and a coloured scarf that overhung a crumpled shirt-front.

"Where've you been ?" Edwin asked.

"Tennis dance. Didn't you know ?"

"No," said Edwin.

"Really !" Johnnie murmured, with a falsely ingenuous air. After a pause he said : "They've left you all alone, then ?"

"I was in the breakfast-room," said Edwin, when he had given further information.

They walked into the breakfast-room together. Charlie's cigarette-case lay on the tray.

"Those your cigarettes ?" Johnnie inquired.

"No. They're Charlie's."

"Oh ! Master Charlie's, are they ? I wonder if they're

any good." He took one fastidiously. Between two enormous outblowings of smoke he said: "Well, I'm dashed! So Charlie's come with her! I hope the kid'll soon be better. . . . I should have been back long ago, only I took Mrs. Chris Hamson home."

"Who's Mrs. Chris Hamson?"

"Don't you know her? She's a ripping woman."

He stood there in all the splendour of thirty years, with more than Charlie's *naïveté*, politely trying to enter into the life of the household, but failing to do so because of his pre-occupation with the rippingness of Mrs. Chris Hamson. The sight of him gave pleasure to Edwin. It did not occur to him to charge the young man with being callous.

When the cigarette was burnt, Johnnie said—

"Well, I think I shall leave seeing Charlie till breakfast."

And he went to bed. On reaching the first-floor corridor he wished that he had gone to bed half a minute sooner; for in the corridor he encountered Janet, who had risen and was returning to her post; and Janet's face, though she meant it not, was an accusation. Four o'clock had struck.

v

It was nearly half-past seven before Edwin left the house. In the meantime he had seen Charlie briefly twice, and Janet once, but he had not revisited the sick-room nor seen Hilda again. The boy's condition was scarcely altered; if there was any change, it was for the better.

Dawn had broken. The fog was gone, but a faint mist hung in the trees over the damp lawn. The air was piercingly chill. Yawning and glancing idly about him, he perceived a curious object on the dividing wall. It was the candlestick which he had left there on the previous night. The candle was entirely consumed. "I may as well get over the wall," he said to himself, and he scrambled up it with adventurous cheerfulness and took the candlestick with him; it was covered with drops of moisture. He deposited it in the kitchen where the servant was cleaning the range. On the oak chest in the hall lay the "Manchester Guardian," freshly arrived. He opened it with another heavy yawn. At the head of one column he read, "Death of the Duke of



Clarence," and at the head of another, "Death of Cardinal Manning." The double news shocked him strangely. He thought of what those days had been to others beside himself. And he thought: "Supposing, after all, the kid doesn't come through?"

## CHAPTER XIII

### HIER HEART

#### I

**A**FTER having been to business and breakfasted as usual, Edwin returned to the shop at ten o'clock. He did not feel tired, but his manner was very curt, even with Stifford, and melancholy had taken the place of his joy. The whole town was gloomy, and seemed to savour its gloom luxuriously. But Edwin wondered why he should be melancholy. There was no reason for it. There was less reason for it than there had been for ten years. Yet he was ; and, like the town, he found pleasure in his state. He had no real desire to change it. At noon he suddenly went off home, thus upsetting Stifford's arrangements for the dinner-hour. "I shall lie down for a bit," he said to Maggie. He slept till a little after one o'clock, and he could have slept longer, but dinner was ready. He said to himself with an extraordinary sense of satisfaction, "*I have had a sleep.*" After dinner he lay down again, and slept till nearly three o'clock. It was with the most agreeable sensations that he awakened. His melancholy was passing ; it had not entirely gone, but he could foresee the end of it as of an eclipse. He made the discovery that he had only been tired. Now he was somewhat reposed. And as he lay in repose he was aware of an intensified perception of himself as a physical organism. He thought calmly, "*What a fine thing life is !*"

"I was just going to bring you some tea up," said Maggie, who met him on the stairs as he came down. "I heard you moving. Will you have some ?"

He rubbed his eyes. His head seemed still to be distended with sleep, and this was a part of his well-being. "Aye !" he replied, with lazy satisfaction. "That'll just put me right."

"George is much better," said Maggie.

"Good!" he said heartily.

Joy, wild and exulting, surged through him once more; and it was of such a turbulent nature that it would not suffer any examination of its origin. It possessed him by its might. As he drank the admirable tea he felt that he still needed a lot more sleep. There were two points of pressure at the top of his head. But he knew that he could sleep, and sleep well, whenever he chose; and that on the morrow his body would be perfectly restored.

He walked briskly back to the shop, intending to work, and he was a little perturbed to find that he could not work. His head refused. He sat in the cubicle vaguely staring. Then he was startled by a tremendous yawn, which seemed to have its inception in the very centre of his being, and which by the pang of its escape almost broke him in pieces. "I've never yawned like that before," he thought, apprehensive. Another yawn of the same seismic kind succeeded immediately, and these frightful yawns continued one after another for several minutes, each leaving him weaker than the one before. "I'd better go home while I can," he thought, intimidated by the suddenness and the mysteriousness of the attack. He went home. Maggie at once said that he would be better in bed, and to his own astonishment he agreed. He could not eat the meal that Maggie brought to his room.

"There's something the matter with you," said Maggie.

"No. I'm only tired." He knew it was a lie.

"You're simply burning," she said, but she refrained from any argument, and left him.

He could not sleep. His anticipations in that respect were painfully falsified.

Later, Maggie came back.

"Here's Dr. Heve," she said briefly, in the doorway. She was silhouetted against the light from the landing. The doctor, in mourning, stood behind her.

"Dr. Heve? What the devil——" But he did not continue the protest.

Maggie advanced into the room and turned up the gas, and the glare wounded his eyes.

"Yes," said Dr. Heve, at the end of three minutes. "You've got it. Not badly, I hope. But you've got it all right."

Humiliating! For the instinct of the Clayhangers was always to assume that by virtue of some special prudence, or immunity, or resisting power, peculiar to them alone, they would escape any popular affliction such as an epidemic. In the middle of the night, amid feverish tossings and crises of thirst, and horrible *malaise*, it was more than humiliating! Supposing he died? People did die of influenza. The strangest, the most monstrous things did happen. For the first time in his life he lay in the genuine fear of death. He had never been ill before. And now he was ill. He knew what it was to be ill. The stupid, blundering clumsiness of death aroused his angry resentment. No! It was impossible that he should die! People did not die of influenza.

The next day the doctor laughed. But Edwin said to himself: "He may have laughed only to cheer me up. They never tell their patients the truth." And every cell of his body was vitiated, poisoned, inefficient, profoundly demoralized. Ordinary health seemed the most precious and the least attainable boon.

## II

After wildernesses of time that were all but interminable, the attack was completely over. It had lasted a hundred hours, of which the first fifty had each been an age. It was a febrile attack similar to George's, but less serious. Edwin had possibly caught the infection at Knype Railway Station: yet who could tell? Now he was in the drawing-room, shaved, clothed, but wearing slippers for a sign that he was only convalescent, and because the doctor had forbidden him the street. He sat in front of the fire, in the easy chair that had been his father's favourite. On his left hand were an accumulation of newspapers and a book; on his right, some business letters and documents left by the assiduous Stifford after a visit of sympathy and of affairs. The declining sun shone with weak goodwill on the garden.

"Please, sir, there's a lady," said the servant, opening the door.

He was startled. His first thought naturally was, "It's Hilda!" in spite of the extreme improbability of it being Hilda. Hilda had never set foot in his house. Nevertheless, supposing it was Hilda, Maggie would assuredly come into the drawing-room she could not do otherwise—and the three-cornered interview would, he felt, be very trying. He knew that Maggie, for some reason inexplicable by argument, was out of sympathy with Hilda, as with Hilda's son. She had given him regular news of George, who was now at about the same stage of convalescence as himself, but she scarcely mentioned the mother, and he had not dared to inquire. These thoughts flashed through his brain in an instant.

"Who is it?" he asked gruffly.

"I—I don't know, sir. Shall I ask?" replied the servant, blushing as she perceived that once again she had sinned. She had never before been in a house where aristocratic ceremony was carried to such excess as at Edwin's. Her unconquerable instinct, upon opening the front door to a well-dressed stranger, was to rush off and publish the news that somebody mysterious and grand had come, leaving the noble visitor on the door-mat. She had been instructed in the ritual proper to these crises, but with little good result, for the crises took her unawares.

"Yes. Go and ask the name, and then tell my sister," said Edwin shortly.

"Miss Clayhanger is gone out, sir."

"Well, run along," he told her impatiently.

He was standing anxiously near the door when she returned to the room.

"Please, sir, it's a Mrs. Cannon, and it's you she wants."

"Show her in," he said, and to himself: "My God!"

In the ten seconds that elapsed before Hilda appeared he glanced at himself in the mantel mirror, fidgeted with his neck-tie, and walked to the window and back again to his chair. She had actually called to see him! . . . His agitation was extreme. . . . But how like her it was to call thus boldly! . . . Maggie's absence was providential.

Hilda entered, to give him a lesson in blandness. She wore



a veil, and carried a muff—outworks of her self-protective, impassive demeanour. She was pale, and as calm as pale. She would not take the easy chair which he offered her. Useless to insist—she would not take it. He brushed away letters and documents from the small chair to his right, and she took that chair. . . . Having taken it, she insisted that he should resume the easy chair.

“I called just to say good-bye,” she said. “I knew you couldn’t come out, and I’m going to-night.”

“But surely he isn’t fit to travel?” Edwin exclaimed.

“George? Not yet. I’m leaving him behind. You see I mustn’t stay away longer than’s necessary.”

She smiled, and lifted her veil as far as her nose. She had not smiled before.

“Charlie’s gone back?”

“Oh yes. Two days ago. He left a message for you.”

“Yes. Maggie gave it me. By the way, I’m sorry she’s not in.”

“I’ve just seen her,” said Hilda.

“Oh!”

“She came in to see Janet. They’re having a cup of tea in George’s bedroom. So I put my things on and walked round here at once.”

As Hilda made this surprising speech she gazed full at Edwin.

### III

A blush slowly covered his face. They both sat silent. Only the fire crackled lustily. Edwin thought, as his agitation increased and entirely confused him, “No other woman was ever like this woman!” He wanted to rise masterfully, to accomplish some gesture splendid and decisive, but he was held in the hollow of the easy chair as though by paralysis. He looked at Hilda; he might have been looking at a stranger. He tried to read her face, and he could not read it. He could only see in it vague trouble. He was afraid of her. The idea even occurred to him that, could he be frank with himself, he would admit that he hated her. The moments were intensely painful; the suspense exasperating and excruciating. Ever since their last encounter he

had anticipated this scene ; his fancy had been almost continuously busy in fashioning this scene. And now the reality had swept down upon him with no warning, and he was overwhelmed.

She would not speak. She had withdrawn her gaze, but she would not speak. She would force him to speak.

" I say," he began gruffly, in a resentful tone, careless as to what he was saying, " you might have told me earlier—what you told me on Wednesday night. Why didn't you tell me when I was at Brighton ? "

" I wanted to," she said meekly. " But I couldn't. I really couldn't bring myself to do it."

" Instead of telling me a lie," he went on. " I think you might have trusted me more than that."

" A lie ? " she muttered. " I told you the truth. I told you he was in prison."

" You told me your husband was in prison," he corrected her, in a voice meditative and judicial. He knew not in the least why he was talking in this strain.

She began to cry. At first he was not sure that she was crying. He glanced surreptitiously, and glanced away as if guilty. But at the next glance he was sure. Her eyes glistened behind the veil, and tear-drops appeared at its edge and vanished under her chin.

" You don't know how much I wanted to tell you ! " she wept.

She hid her half-veiled face in her hands. And then he was victimized by the blackest desolation. His one desire was that the scene should finish, somehow, anyhow.

" I never wrote to you because there was nothing to say. Nothing ! " She sobbed, still covering her face.

" Never wrote to me—do you mean——"

She nodded violently twice. " Yes. *Then !* " He divined that suddenly she had begun to talk of ten years ago. " I knew you'd know it was because I couldn't help it." She spoke so indistinctly through her emotion and her tears, and her hands, that he could not distinguish the words.

" What do you say ? "

" I say I couldn't help doing what I did. I knew you'd know I couldn't help it. I couldn't write. It was best for

me to be silent. What else was there for me to do except be silent? I knew you'd know I couldn't help it. It was a——" Sobs interrupted her.

"Of course I knew that," he said. He had to control himself very carefully, or he, too, would have lost command of his voice. Such was her power of suggestion over him that her faithlessness seemed now scarcely to need an excuse.

(Somewhere within himself he smiled as he reflected that he, in his father's place, in his father's very chair, was thus under the spell of a woman whose child was nameless. He smiled grimly at the thought of Auntie Hamps, of Clara, of the pietistic Albert! They were of a different race, a different generation! They belonged to a dead world!)

"I shall tell you," Hilda recommenced mournfully, but in a clear and steady voice, at last releasing her face, which was shaken like that of a child in childlike grief. "You'll never understand what I had to go through, and how I couldn't help myself,"—she was tragically plaintive—"but I shall tell you. . . . You *must* understand!"

She raised her eyes. Already for some moments his hands had been desiring the pale wrists between her sleeve and her glove. They fascinated his hands, which, hesitatingly, went out towards them. As soon as she felt his touch, she dropped to her knees, and her chin almost rested on the arm of his chair. He bent over a face that was transfigured.

"My heart never kissed any other man but you!" she cried. "How often and often and often have I kissed you, and you never knew! . . . It was for a message that I sent George down here—a message to you! I named him after you. . . . Do you think that if dreams could make him your child—he wouldn't be yours?"

Her courage, and the expression of it, seemed to him to be sublime.

"You don't know me!" she sighed, less convulsively.

"Don't I!" he said, with lofty confidence.

After a whole decade his nostrils quivered again to the odour of her olive skin. Drowning amid the waves of her terrible devotion, he was recompensed in the hundredth part of a second for all that through her he had suffered or might hereafter suffer. The many problems and difficulties which marriage

with her would raise seemed trivial in the light of her heart's magnificent and furious loyalty. He thought of the younger Edwin whom she had kissed into rapture, as of a boy too inexperienced in sorrow to appreciate this Hilda. He braced himself to the exquisite burden of life.

# THE CLAYHANGER FAMILY

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## II. HILDA LESSWAYS

### BOOK I

### HER START IN LIFE

#### CHAPTER I

#### AN EVENT IN MR. SKELLORN'S LIFE

##### I

**T**HE Lessways household, consisting of Hilda and her widowed mother, was temporarily without a servant. Hilda hated domestic work, and because she hated it she often did it passionately and thoroughly. That afternoon, as she emerged from the kitchen, her dark, defiant face was full of grim satisfaction in the fact that she had left a kitchen polished and irreproachable, a kitchen without the slightest indication that it ever had been or ever would be used for preparing human nature's daily food ; a show kitchen. Even the apron which she had worn was hung in concealment behind the scullery door. The lobby clock, which stood over six feet high and had to be wound up every night by hauling on a rope, was noisily getting ready to strike two. But for Mrs. Lessways' disorderly and undesired assistance, Hilda's task might have been finished a quarter of an hour earlier. She passed quietly up the stairs. When she was near the top, her mother's voice, at once querulous and amiable, came from the sitting-room :

“ Where are you going to ? ”

There was a pause, dramatic for both of them, and in that minute pause the very life itself of the house seemed for an instant to be suspended, and then the waves of the



hostile love that united these two women resumed their beating, and Hilda's lips hardened.

"Upstairs," she answered callously.

No reply from the sitting-room!

At two o'clock on the last Wednesday of every month, old Mr. Skellorn, employed by Mrs. Lessways to collect her cottage-rents, called with a statement of account, and cash in a linen bag. He was now due. During his previous visit Hilda has sought to instil some common sense into her mother on the subject of repairs, and there had ensued an altercation which had never been settled.

"If I stayed down, she wouldn't like it," Hilda complained fiercely within herself, "and if I keep away she doesn't like that either! That's mother all over!"

She went to her bedroom. And into the soft, controlled shutting of the door she put more exasperated vehemence than would have sufficed to bang it off its hinges.

## II

At this date, late October in 1878, Hilda was within a few weeks of twenty-one. She was a woman, but she could not realize that she was a woman. She remembered that when she first went to school at the age of eight, an assistant teacher aged nineteen had seemed to her to be unquestionably and absolutely a woman, had seemed to belong definitely to a previous generation. The years had passed, and Hilda was now older than that mature woman was then; and yet she could not feel adult, though her childhood gleamed dimly afar off, and though the intervening expanse of ten years stretched out like a hundred years, like eternity. She was in trouble; the trouble grew daily more and more tragic; and the trouble was that she wanted she knew not what. If her mother had said to her squarely, "Tell me what it is will make you a bit more contented, and you shall have it even if it kills me!" Hilda could only have answered with the fervour of despair, "I don't know! I don't know!"

Her mother was a creature contented enough. And why not—with a sufficient income, a comfortable home, and fair health? At the end of a day devoted partly to sheer vacuous idleness and partly to the monotonous simple

machinery of physical existence—everlasting cookery, everlasting cleanliness, everlasting stitchery—her mother did not with a yearning sigh demand, “Must this sort of thing continue for ever, or will a new era dawn?” Not a bit! Mrs. Lessways went to bed in the placid expectancy of a very similar day on the morrow, and of an interminable succession of such days. The which was incomprehensible and offensive to Hilda.

She was in a prison with her mother, and saw no method of escape, saw not so much as a locked door, saw nothing but blank walls. Even could she by a miracle break prison, where should she look for the unknown object of her desire, and for what should she look? Enigmas! It is true that she read, occasionally with feverish enjoyment, especially verse. But she did not and could not read enough. Of the shelf-ful of books which in thirty years had drifted by one accident or another into the Lessways household, she had read every volume, except “Cruden’s Concordance.” A heterogeneous and forlorn assemblage! Lavater’s “Physiognomy,” in a translation and in full calf! Thomson’s “Seasons,” which had thrilled her by its romantic beauty! Mrs. Henry Wood’s “Danesbury House,” and one or two novels by Charlotte M. Yonge and Dinah Maria Craik, which she had gulped eagerly down for the mere interest of their stories. Disraeli’s “Ixion,” which she had admired without understanding it. A “History of the North American Indians”! These were the more exciting items of the set. The most exciting of all was a green volume of Tennyson’s containing “Maud.” She knew “Maud” by heart. By simple unpleasant obstinacy she had forced her mother to give her this volume for a birthday present, having seen a quotation from it in a ladies’ magazine. At that date in Turnhill, as in many other towns of England, the poem had not yet lived down a reputation for immorality; but fortunately Mrs. Lessways had only the vaguest notion of its dangerousness, and was indeed a negligent kind of woman. Dangerous the book was! Once in reciting it aloud in her room, Hilda had come so near to fainting that she had had to stop and lie down on the bed, until she could convince herself that she was not the male lover crying to his beloved. An astounding and fearful experience, and not to be too lightly

renewed ! For Hilda, " Maud " was a source of lovely and exquisite pain.

Why had she not used her force of character to obtain more books ? One reason lay in the excessive difficulty to be faced. Birthdays are infrequent ; and besides, the enterprise of purchasing " Maud " had proved so complicated and tedious that Mrs. Lessways, with that curious stiffness which marked her sometimes, had sworn never to attempt to buy another book. Turnhill, a town of fifteen thousand persons, had no bookseller ; the only bookseller that Mrs. Lessways had ever heard of did business at Oldcastle. Mrs. Lessways had journeyed twice over the Hillport ridge to Oldcastle, in the odd quest of a book called " Maud " by " Tennyson—the poet laureate " ; the book had had to be sent from London ; and on her second excursion to Oldcastle Mrs. Lessways had been caught by the rain in the middle of Hillport Marsh. No ! Hilda could not easily demand the gift of another book, when all sorts of nice, really useful presents could be bought in the High Street. Nor was there in Turnhill a Municipal Library, nor any public lending library.

Yet possibly Hilda's terrific egoism might have got fresh books somehow from somewhere, had she really believed in the virtue of books. Thus far, however, books had not furnished her with what she wanted, and her faith in their promise was insecure.

Books failing, might she not have escaped into some vocation ? The sole vocation conceivable for her was that of teaching, and she knew, without having tried it, that she abhorred teaching. Further, there was no economical reason why she should work. In 1878, unless pushed by necessity, no girl might dream of a vocation : the idea was monstrous ; it was almost unmentionable. Still further, she had no wish to work for work's sake. Marriage remained. But she felt herself a child, ages short of marriage. And she never met a man. It was literally a fact that, except Mr. Skellorn, a few tradesmen, the vicar, the curate, and a sidesman or so, she never even spoke to a man from one month's end to the next. The Church choir had its annual dance, to which she was invited ; but the perverse creature cared not for dancing. Her mother did not seek society, did not appear

to require it. Nor did Hilda acutely feel the lack of it. She could not define her need. All she knew was that youth, moment by moment, was dropping down inexorably behind her. And, still a child in heart and soul, she saw herself ageing, and then aged, and then withered. Her twenty-first birthday was well above the horizon. Soon, soon she would be 'over twenty-one'! And she was not yet born! That was it! She was not yet born! If the passionate strength of desire could have done the miracle, time would have stood still in the heavens while Hilda sought the way of life.

And withal she was not wholly unhappy. Just as her attitude to her mother was self-contradictory, so was her attitude towards existence. Sometimes this profound infelicity of hers changed its hues for an instant, and lo! it was bliss that she was bathed in. A phenomenon which disconcerted her! She did not know that she had the most precious of all faculties, the power to feel intensely.

### III

Mr. Skellorn did not come; he was most definitely late.

From the window of her bedroom, at the front of the house, Hilda looked westwards up toward the slopes of Chatterley Wood, where as a child she used to go with other children to pick the sparse bluebells that thrived on smoke. The bailiwick of Turnhill lay behind her; and all the murky district of the Five Towns, of which Turnhill is the northern outpost, lay to the south. At the foot of Chatterley Wood the canal wound in large curves on its way towards the undefiled plains of Cheshire and the sea. On the canal-side, exactly opposite to Hilda's window, was a flour-mill, that sometimes made nearly as much smoke as the kilns and chimneys closing the prospect on either hand. From the flour-mill a bricked path, which separated a considerable row of new cottages from their appurtenant gardens, led straight into Lessways Street, in front of Mrs. Lessways' house. By this path Mr. Skellorn should have arrived, for he inhabited the farthest of the cottages.

Hilda held Mr. Skellorn in disdain, as she held the row of cottages in disdain. It seemed to her that Mr. Skellorn

and the cottages mysteriously resembled each other in their primness, their smugness, their detestable self-complacency. Yet those cottages, perhaps thirty in all, had stood for a great deal until Hilda, glancing at them, shattered them with her scorn. The row was called Freehold Villas: a consciously proud name in a district where much of the land was copyhold and could only change owners subject to the payment of 'fines' and to the feudal consent of a 'court' presided over by the agent of a lord of the manor. Most of the dwellings were owned by their occupiers, who, each an absolute monarch of the soil, niggled in his sooty garden of an evening amid the flutter of drying shirts and towels. Freehold Villas symbolized the final triumph of Victorian economics, the apotheosis of the prudent and industrious artisan. It corresponded with a Building Society Secretary's dream of paradise. And indeed it was a very real achievement. Nevertheless Hilda's irrational contempt would not admit this. She saw in Freehold Villas nothing but narrowness (what long narrow strips of gardens, and what narrow homes all flattened together!), and uniformity, and brickiness, and polished brassiness, and righteousness, and an eternal laundry.

From the upper floor of her own home she gazed destructively down upon all that, and into the chill, crimson eye of the descending sun. Her own home was not ideal, but it was better than all that. It was one of the two middle houses of a detached terrace of four houses built by her grandfather Lessways, the teapot manufacturer; it was the chief of the four, obviously the habitation of the proprietor of the terrace. One of the corner houses comprised a grocer's shop, and this house had been robbed of its just proportion of garden so that the seigneurial garden-plot might be triflingly larger than the others. The terrace was not a terrace of cottages, but of houses rated at from twenty-six to thirty-six pounds a year; beyond the means of artisans and petty insurance agents and rent-collectors. And further, it was well built, generously built; and its architecture, though debased, showed some faint traces of Georgian amenity. It was admittedly the best row of houses in that newly settled quarter of the town. In coming to it out of Freehold Villas



Mr. Skellorn obviously came to something superior, wider, more liberal.

Suddenly Hilda heard her mother's voice, in a rather startled conversational tone, and then another woman speaking; then the voices died away. Mrs. Lessways had evidently opened the back door to somebody, and taken her at once into the sitting-room. The occurrence was unusual. Hilda went softly out on to the landing and listened, but she could catch nothing more than a faint, irregular murmur. Scarcely had she stationed herself on the landing when her mother burst out of the sitting-room, and called loudly:

"Hilda!" And again in an instant, very impatiently and excitedly, long before Hilda could possibly have appeared in response, had she been in her bedroom, as her mother supposed her to be: "Hilda!"

Hilda could see without being seen. Mrs. Lessways' thin, wrinkled face, bordered by her untidy but still black and glossy hair, was upturned from below in an expression of tragic fretfulness. It was the uncontrolled face, shamelessly expressive, of one who thinks himself unwatched. Hilda moved silently to descend, and then demanded in a low tone whose harsh self-possession was a reproof to that volatile creature, her mother:

"What's the matter?"

Mrs. Lessways gave a surprised "Oh!" and like a flash her features changed in the attempt to appear calm and collected.

"I was just coming downstairs," said Hilda. And to herself: "She's always trying to pretend I'm nobody, but when the least thing happens out of the way, she runs to me for all the world like a child." And as Mrs. Lessways offered no reply, but simply stood at the foot of the stairs, she asked again: "What is it?"

"Well," said her mother lamentably. "It's Mr. Skellorn. Here's Mrs. Grant——"

"Who's Mrs. Grant?" Hilda inquired, with a touch of scorn, although she knew perfectly well that Mr. Skellorn had a married daughter of that name.

"Hsh! Hsh!" Mrs. Lessways protested, indicating the

open door of the sitting-room. " You know Mrs. Grant ! It seems Mr. Skellorn has had a paralytic stroke. Isn't it terrible ? "

Hilda continued smoothly to descend the stairs, and followed her mother into the sitting-room.

## CHAPTER II

### THE END OF THE SCENE

#### I

THE linen money-bag and the account-book, proper to the last Wednesday in the month, lay on the green damask cloth of the round table where Hilda and her mother took their meals. A paralytic stroke had not been drastic enough to mar Mr. Skellorn's most precious reputation for probity and reliability. His statement of receipts and expenditure, together with the corresponding cash, had been due at two o'clock, and despite the paralytic stroke it was less than a quarter of an hour late. On one side of the bag and the book were ranged the older women, —Mrs. Lessways, thin and vivacious, and Mrs. Grant, large and solemn; and on the other side, as it were in opposition, the young, dark, slim girl with her rather wiry black hair, and her straight, prominent eyebrows, and her extraordinary expression of uncompromising aloofness.

"She's just enjoying it, that's what she's doing!" said Hilda to herself, of Mrs. Grant.

And the fact was that Mrs. Grant, quite unconsciously, did appear to be savouring the catastrophe with pleasure. Although paralytic strokes were more prevalent at that period than now, they constituted even then a striking dramatic event. Moreover, they were considered as direct visitations of God. Also there was something mysteriously and agreeably impressive in the word 'paralytic,' which people would repeat for the pleasure of repeating it. Mrs. Grant, over whose mighty breast flowed a black mantle suited to the occasion, used the word again and again as she narrated afresh for Hilda the history of the stroke.

"Yes," she said, "they came and fetched me out of my bed at three o'clock this morning; and would you believe

me, though he couldn't hardly speak, the money and this here book was all waiting in his desk, and he would have me come with it! And him sixty-seven! He always was like that. And I do believe if he'd been paralysed on both sides instead of only all down his right side, and speechless too, he'd ha' made me understand as I must come here at two o'clock. If I'm a bit late it's because I was kept at home with my son Enoch; he's got a whitlow that's worrying the life out of him, our Enoch has."

Mrs. Lessways warmly deprecated any apology for inexactitude, and wiped her sympathetic eyes.

"It's all over with father," Mrs. Grant resumed. "Doctor hinted to me quiet-like as he'd never leave his bed again. He's laid himself down for the rest of his days. . . . And he'd been warned! He'd had warnings. But there! . . ."

Mrs. Grant contemplated with solemn gleeful satisfaction the overwhelming grandeur of the disaster that had happened to her father. The active old man, a continual figure of the streets, had been cut off in a moment from the world and condemned for life to a mattress. She sincerely imagined herself to be filled with proper grief; but an æsthetic appreciation of the theatrical effectiveness of the misfortune was certainly stronger in her than any other feeling. Observing that Mrs. Lessways wept, she also drew out a handkerchief.

"I'm wishful for you to count the money," said Mrs. Grant. "I wouldn't like there to be any——"

"Nay, that I'll not!" protested Mrs. Lessways.

Mrs. Grant's pressing duties necessitated her immediate departure. Mrs. Lessways ceremoniously insisted on her leaving by the front door.

"I don't know where you'll find another rent-collector that's worth his salt—in this town," observed Mrs. Grant, on the doorstep. "I can't think *what* you'll do, Mrs. Lessways!"

"I shall collect my rents myself," was the answer.

When Mrs. Grant had crossed the road and taken the bricked path leading to the paralytic's house, Mrs. Lessways slowly shut the door and bolted it, and then said to Hilda:

"Well, my girl, I do think you might have tried to show just a little more feeling!"

They were close together in the narrow lobby, of which the heavy pulse was the clock's ticking.

Hilda replied :

"You surely aren't serious about collecting those rents yourself, are you, mother?"

"Serious? Of course I'm serious!" said Mrs. Lessways.

## II

"Why shouldn't I collect the rents myself?" asked Mrs. Lessways.

This half-defiant question was put about two hours later. In the meantime no remark had been made about the rents. Mother and daughter were now at tea in the sitting-room. Hilda had passed the greater part of those two hours upstairs in her bedroom, pondering on her mother's preposterous notion of collecting the rents herself. Alone, she would invent conversations with her mother, silencing the foolish woman with unanswerable sarcastic phrases that utterly destroyed her illogical arguments. She would repeat these phrases, repeat even entire conversations, with pleasure; and, dwelling also with pleasure upon her grievances against her mother, would gradually arrive at a state of dull-glowing resentment. She could, if she chose, easily free her brain from the obsession either by reading or by a sharp jerk of volition; but often she preferred not to do so, saying to herself voluptuously: "No, I *will* nurse my grievance; I'll nurse it and nurse it and nurse it! It is mine, and it is just, and anybody with any sense at all would admit instantly that I am absolutely right." Thus it was on this afternoon. When she came to tea her face was formidably expressive, nor would she attempt to modify the rancour of those uncompromising features. On the contrary, as soon as she saw that her mother had noticed her condition, she deliberately intensified it.

Mrs. Lessways, who was incapable of sustained thought, and who had completely forgotten and recalled the subject of the cottage-rents several times since the departure of Mrs. Grant, nevertheless at once diagnosed the cause of the



trouble; and with her usual precipitancy began to repulse an attack which had not even been opened. Mrs. Lessways was not good at strategy, especially in conflicts with her daughter. She was an ingenuous, hasty thing, and much too candidly human. And not only was she deficient in practical common sense and most absurdly unable to learn from experience, but she had not even the wit to cover her shortcomings by resorting to the traditional authoritativeness of the mother. Her brief, rare efforts to play the mother were ludicrous. She was too simply honest to acquire stature by standing on her maternal dignity. By a profound instinct she wistfully treated everybody as an equal, as a fellow-creature; even her own daughter. It was not the way to come with credit out of the threatened altercation about rent-collecting.

As Hilda offered no reply, Mrs. Lessways said reproachfully:

"Hilda, you're too bad sometimes!" And then, after a further silence: "Anyhow, I'm quite decided."

"Then what's the good of talking about it?" said the merciless child.

"But *why* shouldn't I collect the rents myself? I'm not asking you to collect them. And I shall save the five per cent., and goodness knows we need it."

"You're more likely to lose twenty-five per cent.," said Hilda. "I'll have some more tea, please."

Mrs. Lessways was quite genuinely scandalized. "You needn't think I shall be easy with those Calder Street tenants, because I shan't! Not me! I'm more likely to be too hard!"

"You'll be too hard, and you'll be too easy, too," said Hilda savagely. "You'll lose the good tenants and you'll keep the bad ones, and the houses will all go to rack and ruin, and then you'll sell all the property at a loss. That's how it will be. And what shall you do if you're not feeling well, and if it rains on Monday mornings?"

Hilda could conceive her mother forgetting all about the rents on Monday morning, or putting them off till Monday afternoon on some grotesque excuse. Her fancy heard the interminable complainings, devisings, futile resolvings of

the self-appointed rent-collector. It was impossible to imagine a woman less fitted by nature than her mother to collect rents from unthrifty artisans such as inhabited Calder Street. The project sickened her. It would render the domestic existence an inferno.

As for Mrs. Lessways, she was shocked, for her project had seemed very beautiful to her, and for the moment she was perfectly convinced that she could collect rents and manage property as well as anyone. She was convinced that her habits were regular, her temper firm and tactful, and her judgment excellent. She was more than shocked; she was wounded. She wept, as she pushed forward Hilda's replenished cup.

"You ought to take shame!" she murmured weakly, yet with certitude.

"Why?" said Hilda, feigning simplicity. "What have I said? *I* didn't begin. You asked me. I can't help what I think."

"It's your tone," said Mrs. Lessways grievously.

### III

Despite all Hilda's terrible wisdom and sagacity, this remark of the foolish mother's was the truest word spoken in the discussion. It was Hilda's tone that was at the root of the evil. If Hilda, with the intelligence as to which she was secretly so complacent, did not amicably rule her mother, the unavoidable inference was that she was either a clumsy or a wicked girl, or both. She indeed felt dimly that she was a little of both. But she did not mind. Sitting there in the small, familiar room, close to the sewing-machine, the steel fender, the tarnished chandelier, and all the other daily objects which she at once detested and loved, sitting close to her silly mother who angered her, and yet in whom she recognized a quality that was mysteriously precious and admirable, staring through the small window at the brown, tattered garden-plot where blackened rhododendrons were swaying in the October blast, she wilfully bathed herself in grim gloom and in an affectation of despair.

Somehow she enjoyed the experience. She had only to tighten her lips—and she became oblivious of her clumsiness

and her cruelty, savouring with pleasure the pain of the situation, clasping it to her! Now and then a thought of Mr. Skellorn's tragedy shot through her brain, and the tenderness of pity welled up from somewhere within her and mingled exquisitely with her dark melancholy. And she found delight in reading her poor mother like an open book, as she supposed. And all the while her mother was dreaming upon the first year of Hilda's life, before she had discovered that her husband's health was as unstable as his character, and comparing the reality of the present with her early illusions. But the clever girl was not clever enough to read just that page.

"We ought to be everything to each other," said Mrs. Lessways, pursuing her reflections aloud.

Hilda hated sentimentalism. She could not stand such talk.

"And you know," said Hilda, speaking very frigidly and with even more than her usual incisive clearness of articulation, "it's not your property. It's only yours for life. It's my property."

The mother's mood changed in a moment.

"How do you know? You've never seen your father's will." She spoke in harsh challenge.

"No; because you've never let me see it."

"You ought to have more confidence in your mother. Your father had. And I'm trustee and executor." Mrs. Lessways was exceedingly jealous of her legal position, whose importance she never forgot nor would consent to minimize.

"That's all very well, for you," said Hilda; "but if the property isn't managed right, I may find myself slaving when I'm your age, mother. And whose fault will it be? . . . However, I shall——"

"You will what?"

"Nothing."

"I suppose her ladyship will be consulting her own lawyer next!" said Mrs. Lessways bitterly.

They looked at each other. Hilda's face flushed to a sombre red. Mrs. Lessways brusquely left the room. Then Hilda could hear her rattling fussily at the kitchen range. After a few minutes Hilda followed her to the kitchen, which

was now nearly in darkness. The figure of Mrs. Lessways, still doing nothing whatever with great vigour at the range, was dimly visible. Hilda approached her, and awkwardly touched her shoulder.

"Mother!" she demanded sharply; and she was astonished by her awkwardness and her sharpness.

"Is that you?" her mother asked, in a queer, foolish tone.

They kissed. Such a candid peacemaking had never occurred between them before. Mrs. Lessways, as simple in forgiveness as in wrath, did not disguise her pleasure in the remarkable fact that it was Hilda who had made the overture. Hilda thought: "How strange I am! What is coming over me?" She glanced at the range in which was a pale gleam of red, and that gleam, in the heavy twilight, seemed to her to be inexpressibly, enchantingly mournful. And she herself was mournful about the future—very mournful. She saw no hope. Yet her sadness was beautiful to her. And he was proud.

## CHAPTER III

### MR. CANNON

#### I

**A**LITTLE later Hilda came downstairs dressed to go out. Her mother was lighting a glimmer of gas in the lobby. Ere Mrs. Lessways could descend from her tiptoes to her heels and turn round Hilda said quickly, forestalling curiosity:

"I'm going to get that thread you want. Just give me some money, will you?"

Nobody could have guessed from her placid tone and indifferent demeanour that she was in a state of extreme agitation. But so it was. Suddenly, after kissing her mother in the kitchen, she had formed a tremendous resolve. And in a moment the resolve had possessed her, sending her flying upstairs, and burning her into a fever, as with the assured movements of familiarity she put on her bonnet, mantle, 'fall,' and gloves in the darkness of the chamber. She held herself in leash while her mother lifted a skirt and found a large loaded pocket within and a purse in the pocket and a sixpence in the purse. But when she had shut the door on all that interior haunted by her mother's restlessness, when she was safe in the porch and in the windy obscurity of the street, she yielded with voluptuous apprehension to a thrill that shook her.

"I might have tidied my hair," she thought. "Pooh! What does my hair matter?"

Her mind was full of an adventure through which she had passed seven years previously, when she was thirteen and a little girl at school. For several days, then, she had been ruthlessly mortifying her mother by complaints about the meals. Her fastidious appetite could not be suited. At last, one noon when the child had refused the whole of a



plenteous dinner, Mrs. Lessways had burst into tears and, slapping four pennies down on the table, had cried, "Here! I fairly give you up! Go out and buy your own dinner! Then perhaps you'll get what you want!" And the child, without an instant's hesitation, had seized the coins and gone out, hatless, and bought food at a little tripe-shop that was also an eating-house and consumed it there; and then in grim silence returned home. Both mother and daughter had been stupefied and frightened by the boldness of the daughter's initiative, by her amazing, flaunting disregard of filial decency. Mrs. Lessways would not have related the episode to anybody upon any consideration whatever. It was a shameful secret, never even referred to. But Mrs. Lessways had unmistakably though indirectly referred to it when in anger she had said to her daughter aged twenty: "I suppose her ladyship will be consulting her own lawyer next!" Hilda had understood, and that was why she had blushed.

And now, as she turned from Lessways Street into the Oldcastle Road, on her way to the centre of the town, she experienced almost exactly the intense excitement of the reckless and supercilious child in quest of its dinner. The only difference was that the recent reconciliation had inspired her with a certain negligent compassion for her mother, with a curious tenderness that caused her to wonder at herself.

## II

The Market Square of Turnhill was very large for the size of the town. The diminutive town hall, which in reality was nothing but a watch-house, seemed to be a mere incident on its irregular expanse, to which the two-storey shops and dwellings made a low border. Behind this crimson, blue-slatted border rose the loftier forms of a church and a large chapel, situate in adjacent streets. The Square was calm and almost deserted in the gloom. It typified the slow tranquillity of the bailiwick, which was removed from the central life of the Five Towns, and unconnected therewith by even a tram or an omnibus. Only within recent years had Turnhill got so much as a railway station—rail-head of a branch line. Turnhill was the extremity of civilization in those parts. Go northwards

out of this Market Square, and you would soon find yourself amid the wild and hilly moorlands, sprinkled with iron-and-coal villages whose red-flaming furnaces illustrated the eternal damnation which was the chief article of their devout religious belief. And in the Market Square not even the late edition of the "Staffordshire Signal" was cried, though it was discreetly on sale with its excellent sporting news in a few shops. In the hot and malodorous candle-lit factories, where the real strenuous life of the town would remain cooped up for another half-hour of the evening, men and women had yet scarcely taken to horse-racing; they would gamble upon rabbits, cocks, pigeons, and their own fists, without the mediation of the "Signal." The one noise in the Market Square was the bell of a hawker selling warm pikelets at a penny each for the high tea of the tradesmen. The hawker was a deathless institution, a living proof that withdrawn Turnhill would continue always to be exactly what it always had been. Still, to the east of the Square, across the High Street, a vast space was being cleared of hovels for the erection of a new town hall daringly magnificent.

Hilda crossed the Square, scorning it.

She said to herself: "I'd better get the thing over before I buy the thread. I should never be able to stand Miss Dayson's finicking! I should scream out!" But the next instant, with her passion for proving to herself how strong she could be, she added: "Well, I just *will* buy the thread first!" And she went straight into Dayson's little fancy shop, which was full of counter and cardboard boxes and Miss Dayson, and stayed therein for at least five minutes, emerging with a miraculously achieved leisureliness. A few doors away was a somewhat new building, of three stories—the highest in the Square. The ground floor was an ironmongery; it comprised also a side entrance, of which the door was always open. This side entrance showed a brass-plate, "Q. Karkeek, Solicitor." And the wire-blinds of the two windows of the first floor also bore the words: "Q. Karkeek, Solicitor. Q. Karkeek, Solicitor." The queerness of the name had attracted Hilda's attention several years earlier, when the signs were fresh. It was an accident that she had noticed it; she had not noticed the door-plates or the wire-blinds

of other solicitors, She did not know Mr. Q. Karkeek by sight, nor even whether he was old or young, married or single, agreeable or repulsive.

The side entrance gave directly on to a long flight of naked stairs, and up these stairs Hilda climbed into the unknown, towards the redoubtable and the perilous. "I'm bound to be seen," she said to herself, "but I don't care, and I *don't* care!" At the top of the stairs was a passage, at right angles, and then a glazed door with the legend in black letters, "Q. Karkeek, Solicitor," and two other doors mysteriously labelled "Private." She opened the glazed door, and saw a dirty middle-aged man on a stool, and she said at once to him, in a harsh, clear, deliberate voice, without giving herself time to reflect:

"I want to see Mr. Karkeek."

The man stared at her sourly, as if bewildered.

She said to herself: "I shan't be able to stand this excitement much longer."

"You can't see Mr. Karkeek," said the man. "Mr. Karkeek's detained at Hanbridge County Court. But if you're in such a hurry like, you'd better see Mr. Cannon. It's Mr. Cannon as they generally do see. Who d'ye come from, miss?"

"Come from?" Hilda repeated, unnerved.

"What name?"

She had not expected this. "I suppose I shall have to tell him!" she said to herself, and aloud: "Lessways."

"Oh! Ah!" exclaimed the man. "Bless us! Yes!" It was as if he had said: "Of course it's Lessways! And don't I know all about *you*!" And Hilda was overwhelmed by the sense of the enormity of the folly which she was committing.

The man swung half round on his stool, and seized the end of an india-rubber tube which hung at the side of the battered and littered desk, just under a gas-jet. He spoke low, like a conspirator, into the mouthpiece of the tube. "Miss Lessways—to see you, sir." Then very quickly he clapped the tube to his ear and listened. And then he put it to his mouth again and repeated: "Lessways." Hilda was agonized.

"I'll ask ye to step this way, miss," said the man, slipping off his stool. At the same time he put a long inky penholder, which he had been holding in his wrinkled right hand, between his teeth.

"Never," thought Hilda as she followed the clerk, in a whirl of horrible misgivings, "never have I done anything as mad as this before! I'm under twenty-one!"

### III

There she was at last, seated in front of a lawyer in a lawyer's office—her ladyship consulting her own lawyer! It seemed incredible! A few minutes ago she had been at home, and now she was in a world unfamiliar and alarming. Perhaps it was a pity that her mother had unsuspectingly put the scheme into her head! However, the deed was done. Hilda generally acted first and reflected afterwards. She was frightened, but rather by the unknown than by anything she could define.

"You've come about the property?" said Mr. Cannon amiably, in a matter-of-fact tone.

He had deep black eyes, and black hair, like Hilda's; good, regular teeth, and a clear complexion; perhaps his nose was rather large, but it was straight. With his large pale hands he occasionally stroked his long soft moustache; the chin was blue. He was smartly dressed in dark blue; he had a beautiful neck-tie, and the genuine whiteness of his wristbands was remarkable in a district where starched linen was usually either grey or bluish. He was not a dandy, but he respected his person; he evidently gave careful attention to his body; and this trait alone set him apart among the citizens of Turnhill.

"Yes," said Hilda. She thought: "He's a very handsome man! How strange I don't remember seeing him in the streets!" She was in awe of him. He was indefinitely older than herself; and she felt like a child, out of place in the easy chair.

"I suppose it's about the rent-collecting?" he pursued.

"Yes—it is," she answered, astonished that he could thus divine her purpose. "I mean——"

"What does your mother want to do?"

"Oh!" said Hilda, speaking low. "It's not mother. I've come to consult you myself. Mother doesn't know. I'm nearly twenty-one, and it's really my property, you know!" She blushed with shame.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. He tried to disguise his astonishment in an easy, friendly smile. But he was most obviously startled. He looked at Hilda in a different way, with a much intensified curiosity.

"Yes," she resumed. He now seemed to her more like a fellow-creature, and less like a member of the inimical older generation.

"So you're nearly twenty-one?"

"In December," she said. "And I think under my father's will——" She stopped, at a loss. "The fact is, I don't think mother will be quite able to look after the property properly, and I'm afraid—you see, now that Mr. Skellorn has had this stroke——"

"Yes," said Mr. Cannon, "I heard about that, and I was thinking perhaps Mrs. Lessways had sent you. . . . We collect rents, you know."

"I see!" Hilda murmured. "Well, the truth is, mother hasn't the slightest idea I'm here. Not the slightest! And I wouldn't hurt her feelings for anything." He nodded sympathetically. "But I thought something ought to be done. She's decided to collect our Calder Street rents herself, and she isn't fitted to do it. And then there's the question of the repairs. . . . I know the rents are going down. I expect it's all mother's for life, but I want there to be something left for me when she's gone, you see! And if—I've never seen the will. I suppose there's no way of seeing a copy of it, somewhere? . . . I can't very well ask mother again."

"I know all about the will," said Mr. Cannon.

"You do?"

Wondrous, magical man!

"Yes," he explained. "I used to be at Toms & Scoles's. I was there when it was made. I copied it."

"Really!" She felt that he would save her, not only from any possible unpleasant consequences of her escapade, but also from suffering ultimate loss by reason of her mother's foolishness.



"You're quite right," he continued. "I remember it perfectly. Your mother is what we call tenant-for-life; everything goes to you in the end."

"Well?" Hilda asked abruptly. "All I want to know is, what I can do."

"Of course, without upsetting your mother?"

He glanced at her. She blushed again.

"Naturally," she said coldly.

"You say you think the property is going down—it *is*, everybody knows that—and your mother thinks of collecting the rents herself. . . . Well, young lady, it's very difficult, very difficult, your mother being the trustee and executor."

"Yes, that's what she's always saying—she's the trustee and executor."

"You'd better let me think it over for a day or two."

"And shall I call in again?"

"You might slip in if you're passing. I'll see what can be done. Of course it would never do for you to have any difficulty with your mother."

"Oh no!" she concurred vehemently. "Anything would be better than that. But I thought there was no harm in me——"

"Certainly not."

She had a profound confidence in him. And she was very content so far with the result of her adventure.

"I hope nobody will find out I've been here," she said timidly. "Because if it *did* get to mother's ears——"

"Nobody will find out," he reassured her.

Assuredly his influence was tranquillizing. Even while he insisted on the difficulties of the situation, he seemed to be smoothing them away. She was convinced that he would devise some means of changing her mother's absurd purpose and of strengthening her own position. But when, at the end of the interview, he came round the large table which separated them, and she rose and looked up at him, close, she was suddenly very afraid of him. He was a tall and muscular man, and he stood like a monarch, and she stood like a child. And his gesture seemed to say: "Yes, I know you are afraid. And I rather like you to be afraid. But I am benevolent in the exercise of my power." Under

his gaze, her gaze fastened on the wire-blind and the dark window, and she read off the reversed letters on the blind.

Like a mouse she escaped to the stairs. She was happy and fearful and expectant. . . . It was done! She had consulted a lawyer! She was astounded at herself.

In the Market Square it was now black night. She looked shyly up at the lighted wire-blinds over the ironmongery. "I was there!" she said. "He is still there." The whole town, the whole future, seemed to be drenched now in romance. Nevertheless, the causes of her immense discontent had not apparently been removed nor in any way modified.

## CHAPTER IV

### DOMESTICITY INVADED

#### I

EARLY in the afternoon, two days later, Hilda came, with an air of reproach, into her mother's empty bedroom. Mrs. Lessways had contracted a severe cold in the head, a malady to which she was subject and which she accepted with fatalistic submission, even pleasurably giving herself up to it, as a martyr to the rack. Mrs. Lessways' colds annoyed Hilda, who out of her wisdom could always point to the precise indiscretion which had caused them, and to whom the spectacle of a head wrapped day and night in flannel was offensively ridiculous. Moreover, Hilda in these crises was further and still more acutely exasperated by the pillage of her handkerchiefs. Although she possessed a supply of handkerchiefs far beyond her own needs, she really hated to lend to her mother in the hour of necessity. She did lend, and she lent without spoken protest, but with frigid bitterness. Her youthful passion for order and efficiency was aggrieved by her mother's negligent and inadequate arrangements for coping with the inevitable plague. She now made a police-visit to the bedroom because she considered that her mother had been demanding handkerchiefs at a stage too early in the progress of the disease. Impossible that her mother should have come to the end of her own handkerchiefs! She knew with all the certitude of her omniscience that numerous clean handkerchiefs must be concealed somewhere in the untidiness of her mother's wardrobe.

See her as she enters the bedroom, the principal bedroom of the house, whose wide bed and large wardrobe recall the past when she had a father as well as a mother, and when that bedroom awed her footsteps! A thin, brown-frocked girl, wearing a detested but enforced small black

apron ; with fine, pale, determined features, rather unfeminine hair, and glowering, challenging black eyes. She had a very decided way of putting down her uncoquettishly shod feet. Absurdly young, of course ; wistfully young ! She was undeveloped, and did not even look nearly twenty-one. You are at liberty to smile at her airs ; at that careless critical glance which pityingly said : " Ah ! if this were my room, it would be different from what it is " ; at that serious, worried expression, as if the anxiety of the whole world's deficiencies oppressed the heart within ; and at that supreme conviction of wisdom, which after all was little but an exaggerated perception of folly and inconsistency in others ! . . . She is not to be comprehended on an acquaintance of three days. Years must go to the understanding of her. She did not understand herself. She was not even acquainted with herself. Why ! She was naïve enough to be puzzled because she felt older than her mother and younger than her beautiful girlish complexion, simultaneously !

She opened the central mirrored door of the once formidable wardrobe, and as she did so the image of the bed and of half the room shot across the swinging glass, taking the place of her own reflection. And instantly, when she inserted herself between the exposed face of the wardrobe and its door, she was precipitated into the most secret intimacy of her mother's existence. There was the familiar odour of old kid gloves. . . . She was more intimate with her mother now than she could ever be in talking to her. The lower part of this section of the wardrobe consisted of three deep drawers with inset brass handles, an exquisitely exact piece of mahogany cabinet-work. From one of the drawers a bit of white linen untidily protruded. Her mother ! The upper part was filled with sliding trays, each having a raised edge to keep the contents from falling out. These trays were heaped pell-mell with her mother's personal belongings—small garments, odd indeterminate trifles, a muff, a bundle of whalebone, veils, bags, and especially cardboard boxes. Quantities of various cardboard boxes ! Her mother kept everything, could not bear that anything which had once been useful should be abandoned or destroyed ; whereas Hilda's propensity was to throw away with an impatient

gesture whatever threatened to be an encumbrance. Sighing, she began to arrange the contents of the trays in some kind of method. Incompetent and careless mother ! Hilda wondered how the old thing managed to conduct her life from day to day with even a semblance of the decency of order. It did not occur to her that for twenty-five years before she was born, and for a long time afterwards, Mrs. Lessways had contrived to struggle along through the world, without her daughter's aid, to the general satisfaction of herself and some others. At length, ferreting on the highest shelf but one, she had the deep, proud satisfaction of the philosopher who has correctly deduced consequences from character. Underneath a Paisley shawl she discovered a lost treasure of clean handkerchiefs. One, two, three, four—there were eleven ! And among them was one of her own, appropriated by her mother through sheer inexcusable inadvertence. They had probably been lying under the shawl for weeks, months !

Still, she did not allow herself to be vexed. Since the singular hysterical embrace in the twilight of the kitchen, she had felt for her mother a curious, kind, forbearing, fatalistic indulgence. “ Mother is like that, and there you are ! ” And further, her mood had been so changed and uplifted by excitement and expectation that she could not be genuinely harsh. She had been thrilled by the audacity of the visit to Mr. Cannon. And though she hoped from it little but a negative advantage, she was experiencing the rare happiness of adventure. She had slipped out for a moment from the confined and stifling circle of domestic dailiness. She had scented the feverish perfume of the world. And she owed all this to herself alone ! She meant on the morrow, while her mother was marketing, to pursue the enterprise ; the consciousness of this intention was sweet, but she knew not why it was sweet. She only knew that she lived in the pre-occupation of a dream.

Having taken two of the handkerchiefs, she shut the wardrobe and turned the key. She went first to her own small, prim room to restore stolen property to its rightful place, and then she descended towards the kitchen with the other handkerchief. Giving it to her mother, and concealing her triumph



beneath a mask of wise, long-suffering benevolence, she would say: "I've found ten of your handkerchiefs, mother. Here's one!" And her mother, ingenuously startled and pleased, would exclaim: "Where, child?" And she, still controlling herself, as befitted a superior being, would reply casually: "In your wardrobe, of course! You stuck to it there weren't any; but I was sure there were."

## II

The dialogue which actually did accompany the presentation of the handkerchief, though roughly corresponding to her rehearsal of it, was lacking in the dramatic pungency necessary for a really effective triumph; the reason being that the thoughts of both mother and daughter were diverted in different ways from the handkerchief by the presence of Florrie in the kitchen.

Florrie was the new servant, and she had come into the house that morning. Sponsored by an aunt who was one of the best of the Calder Street tenants, Florrie had been accepted rather unwillingly, the objection to her being that she was too young—thirteen and a half. Mrs. Lessways had a vague humanitarian sentiment against the employment of children; as for Hilda's feeling, it was at one moment more compassionate even than her mother's, and at another almost cynically indifferent. The aunt, however, a person of powerful common sense, had persuaded Mrs. Lessways that the truest kindness would be to give Florrie a trial. Florrie was very strong, and she had been brought up to work hard, and she enjoyed working hard. "Don't you, Florrie?" "Yes, aunt," with a delightful smiling, whispering timidity. She was the eldest of a family of ten, and had always assisted her mother in the management of a half-crown house and the nurture of a regiment of infants. But at thirteen and a half a girl ought to be earning money for her parents. Bless you! She knew what a pawnshop was, her father being often out of a job owing to potter's asthma; and she had some knowledge of cookery, and was in particular very good at boiling potatoes. To take her would be a real kindness on the part of Mrs. Lessways, for the 'place' was not merely an easy place, it was a 'good' place. Supposing

that Mrs. Lessways refused to have her,—well, Florrie might go on to a ‘potbank’ and come to harm, or she might engage herself with tradespeople, where notoriously the work was never finished, or she might even be forced into a public-house. Her aunt knew that they wanted a servant at the “Queen Adelaide,” where the wages would be pretty high. But no! No niece of hers should ever go into service at a public-house if she could help it! What with hot rum and coffee to be ready for customers at half-past five of a morning, and cleaning up at nights after closing, a poor girl would never see her bed! Whereas at Mrs. Lessways’ . . . ! So Mrs. Lessways took Florrie in order to save her from slavery.

The slim child was pretty, with graceful and eager movements, and certainly a rapid comprehension. Her grey eyes sparkled, and her brown hair was coquettishly tied up, rather in the manner of a horse’s tail on May Day. She had arrived all by herself in the morning, with a tiny bundle, and she made a remarkably neat appearance—if you did not look at her boots, which had evidently been somebody else’s a long time before. Hilda had been clearly aware of a feeling of pleasure at the prospect of this young girl’s presence in the house.

Hilda now saw her in another aspect. She wore a large foul apron of sacking, which made her elegant body quite shapeless, and she was kneeling on the red-and-black tiled floor of the kitchen, with her enormous cracked boots sticking out behind her. At one side of her was a pail full of steaming brown water, and in her red coarse little hands, which did not seem to belong to those gracile arms, she held a dripping clout. In front of her, on a half-dried space of clean, shining floor, stood Mrs. Lessways, her head wrapped in a flannel petticoat. Nearer to the child stretched a small semicircle of liquid mud; to the rear was the untouched dirty floor. Florrie was looking up at her mistress with respectful, strained attention. She could not proceed with her work because Mrs. Lessways had chosen this moment to instruct her, with much snuffing, in the duties and responsibilities of her position.

“Yes, mum,” Florrie whispered. She seemed to be incapable of speaking beyond a whisper. But the whisper

was delicate and agreeable ; and perhaps it was a mysterious sign of her alleged unusual physical strength.

" You'll have to be down at half-past six. Then you'll light your kitchen fire, but of course you'll get your coal up first. And then you'll do your boots. Now the bacon—but never mind that—either Miss Hilda or me will be down to-morrow morning to show you."

" Yes, mum." Florrie's whisper was grateful.

" When you've got things going a bit like, you'll do your parlour—I've told you all about that, though. But I didn't tell you—except on Wednesdays. On Wednesdays you give your parlour a thorough turn-out *after* breakfast, and mind it's got to be all straight for dinner at half-past twelve."

" Yes, mum."

" I shall show you about your fire-irons——" Mrs. Lessways was continuing to make everything in the house the private property of Florrie, when Hilda interrupted her about the handkerchief, and afterwards with an exhortation to beware of the dampness of the floor, which exhortation Mrs. Lessways faintly resented ; whereupon Hilda left the kitchen ; it was always imprudent to come between Mrs. Lessways and a new servant.

Hilda remained listening in the lobby to the interminable and rambling instruction. At length Mrs. Lessways said benevolently :

" There's no reason why you shouldn't go to bed at half-past eight, or nine at the latest. No reason whatever. And if you're quick and handy—and I'm sure you are—you'll have plenty of time in the afternoon for plain sewing and darning. I shall see how you can darn," Mrs. Lessways added encouragingly.

" Yes, mum."

Hilda's heart revolted, less against her mother's defects as an organizer than against the odious mess of the whole business of domesticity. She knew that, with her mother in the house, Florrie would never get to bed at half-past eight and very seldom at nine, and that she would never be free in the afternoons. She knew that if her mother would only consent to sit still and not interfere, the housework could be

accomplished with half the labour that at present went to it. There were three women in the place, or at any rate, a woman, a young woman, and a girl—and in theory the main preoccupation of all of them was this business of domesticity. It was, of course, ridiculous, and she would never be able to make anyone see that it was ridiculous. But that was not all. The very business itself absolutely disgusted her. It disgusted her to such a point that she would have preferred to do it with her own hands in secret rather than see others do it openly in all its squalor. The business might be more efficiently organized—for example, there was no reason why the sitting-room should be made uninhabitable between breakfast and dinner once a week—but it could never be other than odious. The kitchen floor must inevitably be washed every day by a girl on her knees in sackcloth with terrible hands. She was witnessing now the first stage in the progress of a victim of the business of domesticity. To-day Florrie was a charming young creature, full of slender grace. Soon she would be a dehumanized drudge. And Hilda could not stop it! All over the town, in every street of the town, behind all the nice curtains and blinds, the same hidden shame was being enacted: a vast, sloppy, steaming, greasy, social horror—inevitable! It amounted to barbarism, Hilda thought in her revolt. She turned from it with loathing. And yet nobody else seemed to turn from it with loathing. Nobody else seemed to perceive that this business of domesticity was not life itself, was at best the clumsy external machinery of life. On the contrary, about half the adult population worshipped it as an exercise sacred and paramount, enlarging its importance and with positive gusto permitting it to monopolize their existence. Ninetenths of her mother's conversation was concerned with the business of domesticity—and withal Mrs. Lessways took the business more lightly than most!

## III

There was an impatient knock at the front door,—rare phenomenon, but not unknown.

Mrs. Lessways cried out thickly from the folds of her flannel petticoat:

"Hilda, just see who that is, will you? . . . knocking like that! Florrie can't come."

And just as Hilda reached the front door, her mother opened the kitchen door wide, to view the troublesome disturber and to inform him, if as was probable he was exceeding his rights, that he would have done better to try the back door.

It was Mr. Cannon at the front door.

Hilda heard the kitchen door slammed to behind her, but the noise was like a hallucination in her brain. She was staggered by the apparition of Mr. Cannon in the porch. She had vaguely wondered what he might do to execute his promise of aid; she had felt that time was running short if her mother was to be prevented from commencing rent-collector on the Monday; she had perhaps ingenuously expected from him some kind of miracle; but of a surety she had never dreamed that he would call in person at her home. "He must be mad!" she would have exclaimed to herself, if the grandeur of his image in her heart had not made any such accusation impossible to her. He was not mad; he was merely inscrutable, terrifyingly so. It was as if her adventurous audacity, personified, had doubled back on her, and was exquisitely threatening her.

"Good afternoon!" said Mr. Cannon, smiling confidently and yet with ceremoniousness. "Is your mother about?"

"Yes." Hilda did not know it, but she was whispering quite in the manner of Florrie.

"Shall I come in?"

"Oh! Please do!" The words jumped out of her mouth all at once, so anxious was she to destroy any impression conceivably made that she did not desire him to come in.

He crossed the step and took her hand with one gesture. She shut the door. He waited in suave silence. There was barely space for them together in the narrow lobby, and she scarce dared look up at him. He easily dominated her. His bigness subdued her, and the handsomeness of his face and his attire was like a moral intimidation. He had a large physical splendour that was well set off and illustrated by the brilliance of his linen and his broadcloth. She was as modest as a mouse beside him. The superior young woman, the



stern and yet indulgent philosopher, had utterly vanished, and only a poor little mouse remained.

"Will you please come into the drawing-room?" she murmured when, after an immense effort to keep full control of her faculties, she had decided where he must be put.

"Thanks," he said.

As she diminished herself, with beautiful shy curves of her body, against the wall so that he could manœuvre his bigness through the drawing-room doorway, he gave her a glance half benign and half politely malicious, which seemed to say again: "I know you're afraid, and I rather like it. But you know you needn't be."

"Please take a seat," she implored. And then quickly, as he seemed to have no intention of speaking to her confidentially, "I'll tell mother."

Leaving the room, she saw him sink smoothly into a seat, his rich-piled hat in one gloved hand and an ebony walking-stick in the other. His presence had a disastrous effect on the chill, unfrequented drawing-room, reducing it instantly to a condition of paltry shabbiness.

The kitchen door was still shut. Yes, all the squalor of the business of domesticity must be hidden from this splendid being! Hilda went as a criminal into the kitchen. Mrs. Lessways with violent movements signalled her to close the door before speaking. Florrie gazed spellbound upwards at both of them. The household was in a high fever.

"You don't mean to tell me that's Mr. Cannon!" Mrs. Lessways excitedly whispered.

"Do—do—you know him?" Hilda faltered.

"Do I know him! . . . What does he want?"

"He wants to see you."

"What about?"

"I suppose it's about property or something," Hilda replied, blushing. Never had she felt so abject in front of her mother.

Mrs. Lessways rapidly unpinned the flannel petticoat and then threw it, with a desperate gesture of sacrifice, on to the deal table. The situation had to be met. The resplendent male awaited her in the death-cold room. The resplen-

dent male had his overcoat, but she, suffering, must face the rigour and the risk unprotected. No matter if she caught bronchitis! The thing had to be done. Even Hilda did not think of accusing her mother of folly. Mrs. Lessways having patted her hair, emptied several handkerchiefs from the twin pockets of her embroidered black apron, and, snatching at the clean handkerchief furnished by Hilda, departed to her fate. She was certainly startled and puzzled, but she was not a whit intimidated, and the perception of this fact inspired Hilda with a new, reluctant respect for her mother.

Hilda, from the kitchen, heard the greetings in the drawing-room, and then the reverberations of the sufferer's nose. She desired to go into the drawing-room. Her mother probably expected her to go in. But she dared not. She was afraid.

"I was wondering," said the voice of Mr. Cannon, "whether you've ever thought of selling your Calder Street property, Mrs. Lessways." And then the drawing-room door was closed, and the ticking of the grandfather's clock resumed possession of the lobby.

## CHAPTER V

### MRS. LESSWAYS' SHREWDNESS

#### I

WAITING irresolute in the kitchen doorway, Hilda passed the most thrillingly agreeable moments that destiny had ever vouchsafed to her. She dwelt on the mysterious, attractive quality of Mr. Cannon's voice,—she was sure that, though in speaking to her mother he was softly persuasive, he had used to herself a tone even more intimate and ingratiating. He and she had a secret; they were conspirators together: which fact was both disconcerting and delicious. She recalled their propinquity in the lobby; the remembered syllables which he had uttered mingled with the faint scent of his broadcloth, the whiteness of his wristbands, the gleam of his studs, the droop of his moustaches, the downward ray of his glance, and the proud, nimble carriage of his great limbs,—and formed in her mind the image of an ideal. An image regarded not with any tenderness, but with naïve admiration and unquestioning respect! And yet also with more than that, for when she dwelt on his glance, she had a slight transient feeling of faintness which came and went in a second, and which she did not analyse—and could not have analysed.

Clouds of fear sailed in swift capriciousness across the sky of her dreaming, obscuring it: fear of Mr. Cannon's breath-taking initiative, fear of the upshot of her adventure, and a fear without a name. Nevertheless she exulted. She exulted because she was in the very midst of her wondrous adventure and tingling with a thousand apprehensions.

After a long time the latch of the drawing-room door cracked warningly. Hilda retired within the kitchen out of sight of the lobby. She knew that the child in her would compel her to wait like a child until the visitor was gone,

instead of issuing forth boldly like a young woman. But to Florrie the young mistress with her stern dark mask and formidable eyebrows and air of superb disdain was as august as a goddess. Florrie, moving backwards, had now got nearly to the scullery door with her wringing and splashing and wiping; and she had dirtied even her face. As Hilda absently looked at her, she thought somehow of Mr. Cannon's white wristbands. She saw the washing and the ironing of those wristbands, and a slatternly woman or two sighing and grumbling amid wreaths of steam, and a background of cinders and suds and sloppiness. . . . All that, so that the grand creature might have a rim of pure white to his coat-sleeves for a day! It was inevitable. But the grand creature must never know. The shame necessary to his splendour must be concealed from him, lest he might be offended. And this was woman's loyalty! Her ideas concerning the business of domesticity were now mixed and opposing and irreconcilable, and she began to suspect that the bases of society might be more complex and confusing than in her youthful downrightness she had imagined.

## II

"Well, you've got your way!" said Mrs. Lessways, with a certain grim, disdainful cheerfulness, from which benevolence was not quite absent. The drastic treatment accorded to her cold seemed to have done it good. At any rate she had not resumed the flannel petticoat, and the nasal symptoms were much less pronounced.

"Got my way?" Hilda repeated, at a loss and newly apprehensive.

Mother and daughter were setting tea. Florrie had been doing very well, but she was not yet quite equal to her situation, and the mistresses were now performing her lighter duties while she changed from the offensive drudge to the neat parlourmaid. Throughout the afternoon Hilda had avoided her mother's sight; partly because she wanted to be alone (without knowing why), and partly because she was afraid lest Mr. Cannon, as a member of the older generation, might have betrayed her to her mother. This fear was not very genuine, though she pretended that it was and enjoyed

playing with it: as if she really desired a catastrophe for the outcome of her adventure. She had only come downstairs in response to her mother's direct summons, and instantly on seeing her she had known that Mr. Cannon was not a traitor. Which knowledge somehow rendered her gay in spite of herself. So that, what with this gaiety, and the stimulation produced in Mrs. Lessways by the visit of Mr. Cannon, and the general household relief at the obvious fact that Florrie would rather more than 'do,' the atmosphere around the tinkling tea-table in the half-light was decidedly pleasant.

Nevertheless the singular turn of Mrs. Lessways' phrase,—"You've got your way,"—had startled the guilty Hilda.

"Mr. Cannon's going to see to the collecting of the Calder Street rents," explained Mrs. Lessways. "So I hope you're satisfied, miss."

Hilda was aware of self-consciousness.

"Yes, you may well colour up!" Mrs. Lessways pursued, genial but malicious. "You're as pleased as Punch, and you're saying to yourself you've made your old mother give way to ye again! And so you needn't tell me!"

"I thought," said Hilda, with all possible prim worldliness,—"I thought I heard him saying something about buying the property?"

Mrs. Lessways laughed, sceptically, confidently, as one who could not be deceived. "Pooh!" she said. "That was only a try-on. That was only so that he could begin his palaver! Don't tell me! I may be a simpleton, but I'm not such a simpleton as he thinks for, nor as some other folks think for, either!" (At this point Hilda had to admit that in truth her mother was not completely a simpleton. In her mother was a vein of perceptive shrewdness that occasionally cropped out and made all Hilda's critical philosophy seem schoolgirlish.) "Do you think I don't know George Cannon? He came here o' purpose to get that rent-collecting. Well, he's got it, and he's welcome to it, for I doubt not he'll do it a sight better than poor Mr. Skellorn! But he needn't hug himself that he's been too clever for me, because he hasn't. I gave him the rent-collecting because I thought I would! . . . Buy! He's no more got a good



customer for Calder Street than he's got a good customer for this slop-bowl!"

Hilda resented this casual detraction of a being who had so deeply impressed her. And, moreover, she was convinced that her mother, secretly very flattered and delighted by the visit, was adopting a derisive attitude in order to 'show off' before her daughter. Parents are thus ingenuous! But she was so shocked and sneaped that she found it more convenient to say nothing.

"George Cannon could talk the hind leg off a horse," Mrs. Lessways continued quite happily. "And yet it isn't as if he said a great deal. He doesn't. I'll say this for him. He's always the gentleman. And I couldn't say as much for his sister being a lady, and I'm sorry for it. He's the most gentlemanly man in Turnhill, and always so spruce, too!"

"His sister?"

"Well, his half-sister, since you're so particular, Miss Precise!"

"Not Miss Gailey?" said Hilda, who began faintly to recall a forgotten fact of which she thought she had once been cognizant.

"Yes, Miss Gailey," Mrs. Lessways snapped, still very genial and content. "I did hear she's quarrelled out and out with *him*, too, at last!" She tightened her lips. "Draw the blind down."

Miss Gailey, a spinster of superior breeding and a teacher of dancing, had in the distant past been an intimate friend of Mrs. Lessways. The friendship was legendary in the house, and the grand quarrel which had finally put an end to it dated in Hilda's early memories like a historical event. For many years the two had not exchanged a word.

Mrs. Lessways lit the gas, and the china and the white cloth and the coloured fruit-jelly and the silver spoons caught the light and threw it off again, with gaiety.

"Has she swept the hearth? Yes, she has," said Mrs. Lessways, glancing round at the red fire.

Hilda sat down to wait, folding her hands as it were in meekness. In a few moments Florrie entered with the teapot and the hot-water jug. The child wore proudly a new

white apron that was a little too long for her, and she smiled happily at Mrs. Lessways' brief compliment on her appearance and her briskness. She might have been in paradise.

"Come in for your cup in three minutes," said Mrs. Lessways; and to Hilda, when Florrie had whispered and gone: "Now we shall see if she can make tea. I told her very particularly this morning, and she seems quick enough."

And when three minutes had expired Mrs. Lessways tasted the tea. Yes, it was good. It was quite good. Undeniably the water had boiled within five seconds of being poured on the leaves. There was something *in* this Florrie. Already she was exhibiting the mysterious quality of efficiency. The first day, being the first day, had of course not been without its discouraging moments, but on the whole Florrie had proved that she could be trusted to understand, and to do things.

"Here's an extra piece of sugar for you," said Mrs. Lessways, beaming, as Florrie left the parlour with her big breakfast-cup full of steaming tea, to drink with the thick bread-and-butter on the scrubbed kitchen-table, all by herself. "And don't touch the gas in the kitchen—it's quite high enough for young eyes," Mrs. Lessways cried out after her.

"Little poppet!" she murmured to herself, maternally reflecting upon Florence's tender youth.

### III

She was happy, was Mrs. Lessways, in her domesticity. She foresaw an immediate future that would be tranquil. She was preparing herself to lean upon the reliability of Florrie as upon a cushion. She liked the little poppet. And she liked well-made tea and pure jelly. And she had settled the Calder Street problem; and incidentally Hilda was thereby placated. Why should she not be happy? She wished for nothing else. And she was not a woman to meet trouble half-way. One of her greatest qualities was that she did not unduly worry. (Hilda might say that she did not worry enough, letting things go.) In spite of her cold, she yielded with more gusto than usual to the meal, and even said that if Florrie 'continued to shape' they would have hot toast again. Hot toast had long since been dropped

from the menu, as an item too troublesome. As a rule the meals were taken hurriedly and negligently, like a religious formality which has lost its meaning but which custom insists on.

Hilda could not but share her mother's satisfaction. She could not entirely escape the soft influence of the tranquillity in which the household was newly bathed. The domestic existence of unmated women together, though it is full of secret exasperations, also has its hours of charm—a charm honied, perverse, and unique. Hilda felt the charm. But she was suddenly sad, and she again found pleasure in her sadness. She was sad because her adventure was over—over too soon and too easily. She thought, now, that really she would have preferred a catastrophe as the end of it. She had got what she desired; but she was no better off than she had been before the paralytic stroke of Mr. Skellorn. Domesticity had closed in on her once more. Her secret adventure had become sterile. Its risks were destroyed, and nothing could spring from it. Nevertheless it lived in her heart. After all it had been tremendous! And the virtue of audacious initiative was miraculous! . . . Yes, her mother was shrewd enough—that could not be denied—but she was not so shrewd as she imagined; for it had never occurred to her, and it never would occur to her, even in the absurdest dream—that the author of Mr. Cannon's visit was the girl sitting opposite to her and delicately pecking at jelly!

"How is he Miss Gailey's half-brother?" Hilda demanded half-way through the meal.

"Why! Mrs. Gailey—Sarah Gailey's mother, that is—married a foreigner after her first husband died."

"But Mr. Cannon isn't a foreigner?"

"He's half a foreigner. Look at his eyes. Surely you knew all about that, child! . . . No, it was before your time."

Hilda then learnt that Mrs. Gailey had married a French modeller named Canonges, who had been brought over from Limoges (or some such sounding place) by Peels at Bursley, the great rivals of Mintons and of Copelands. And that in course of time the modeller had informally changed the name to Cannon, because no one in the Five Towns could

pronounce the true name rightly. And that George Cannon, the son of the union, had been left early an orphan.

"How did he come to be a solicitor?" Hilda questioned eagerly.

"They say he isn't really a solicitor," said Mrs. Lessways. "That is, he hasn't passed his examinations like. But I dare say he knows as much law as a lot of 'em, *and* more! And he has that Mr. Karkeek to cover him like. That's what they *say*. . . . He used to be a lawyer's clerk—at Toms & Scoles's, I think it was. Then he left the district for a year or two—or it might be several. And then his lordship comes back all of a sudden, and sets up with Mr. Karkeek, just like that."

"Can he talk French?"

"Who? Mr. Cannon? He can talk *English*! My word, he can that! Eh, he's a 'customer,' he is—a regular 'customer'!"

Hilda, instead of being seated at the table, was away in far realms of romance.

The startling thought occurred to her:

"Of course, he'll expect me to go and see him! He's done what I asked him, and he'll expect me to go and see him and talk it over. And I suppose I shall have to pay him something. I'd forgotten that, and I ought not to have forgotten it."

## CHAPTER VI

### VICTOR HUGO AND ISAAC PITMAN

#### I

THE next morning, Saturday, Hilda ran no risk in visiting Mr. Cannon. Her mother's cold, after a fictitious improvement, had assumed an aggravated form in order to prove that not with impunity may nature be flouted in unheated October drawing-rooms; and Hilda had been requested to go to market alone. She was free. And even supposing that the visit should be observed by the curious, nobody would attach any importance to it, because everybody would soon be aware that Mr. Cannon had assumed charge of the Calder Street property.

Past the brass-plates of Mr. Q. Karkeek, out of the straw-littered hubbub of the market-place, she climbed the long flight of stairs leading to the offices on the first floor. In one worsted-gloved hand she held a market-basket of multi-coloured wicker, which dangled a little below the frilled and flounced edge of her blue jacket. Secure in the pocket of her valanced brown skirt—for at that time and in that place it had not yet occurred to any woman that pockets were a superfluity—a private half-sovereign lay in the inmost compartment of her purse; this coin was destined to recompense Mr. Cannon. Her free hand went up to the heavy chignon that hung uncertainly beneath her bonnet—a gesture of coquetry which she told herself she despised.

Her face was a prim and rather forbidding mask, assuredly a mysterious mask. She could not have explained her own feelings. She was still in the adventure, but the end of it was immediate. She had nothing to hope from the future. Her essential infelicity was as profound and as enigmatic as ever. She might have said with deliberate and vehement sincerity that she was not happy. Wise, experienced ob-



servers, studying her as she walked her ways in the streets, might have said of her with sympathetically sad conviction, "That girl is not happy! What a pity!" It was so. And yet, in her unhappiness she was blest. She savoured her unhappiness. She drank it down passionately, as though it were the very water of life—which it was. She lived to the utmost in every moment. The recondite romance of existence was not hidden from her. The sudden creation—her creation—of the link with Mr. Cannon seemed to her surpassingly strange and romantic; and in so regarding it she had no ulterior thought whatever: she looked on it with the single-mindedness of an artist looking on his work. And was it not indeed astounding that by a swift caprice and stroke of audacity she should have changed and tranquillized the ominous future for her unsuspecting mother and herself? Was it not absolutely disconcerting that she and this Mr. Cannon, whom she had never known before and in whom she had no other interest, should bear between them this singular secret, at once innocent and guilty, in the midst of the whole town so deaf and blind?

## II

A somewhat shabby-genteel, youngish man appeared at the head of the stairs; he was wearing a silk hat and a too ample frock-coat. And immediately, from the hidden corridor at the top, she heard the voice of Mr. Cannon, imperious:

"Karkeek!"

The shabby-genteel man stopped. Hilda wanted to escape, but she could not, chiefly because her pride would not allow. She had to go on. She went on, frowning.

The man vanished back into the corridor. She could hear that Mr. Cannon had joined him in conversation. She arrived at the corridor.

"How-d'ye-do, Miss Lessways?" Mr. Cannon greeted her with calm politeness, turning from Mr. Karkeek, who raised his hat. "Will you come this way? One moment, Mr. Karkeek."

Through a door marked "Private" Mr. Cannon introduced Hilda straight into his own room; then shut the

door on her. He held in one hand a large calf-bound volume, from which evidently he was expounding something to Mr. Karkeek. The contrast between the expensive informality of Mr. Cannon's new suit and the battered ceremoniousness of Mr. Karkeek's struck her just as much as the contrast between their demeanours; and she felt, vaguely, the oddness of the fact that the name of the deferential Mr. Karkeek, and not the name of the commanding Mr. Cannon, should be upon the door-plates and the wire-blinds of the establishment. But of course she was not in a position to estimate the full significance of this remarkable phenomenon. Further, though she perfectly remembered her mother's observations upon Mr. Cannon's status, they did not in the slightest degree damage him in her eyes—when once those eyes had been set on him again. They seemed to her inessential. The essential, for her, was the incontestable natural authority and dignity of his bearing.

She sat down, self-consciously, in the chair—opposite the owner's chair—which she had occupied at her first visit, and thus surveyed, across the large flat desk, all the ranged documents and bundles with the writing thereon upside down. There also was his blotting-pad, and his vast ink-stand, and his pens, and his thick diary. The disposition of the things on the desk seemed to indicate, sharply and incontrovertibly, that orderliness, that inexorable efficiency, which more than aught else she admired in the external conduct of life. The spectacle satisfied her, soothed her, and seemed to explain the attractiveness of Mr. Cannon.

Immediately to her left was an open bookcase almost filled with heavy volumes. The last of a uniform row of Law Reports was absent from its place—being at that moment in the corridor, in the hands of Mr. Cannon. The next book, a thin one, had toppled over sideways and was bridging the vacancy at an angle; several other similar thin books filled up the remainder of the shelf. She stared, with the factitious interest of one who is very nervously awaiting an encounter, at the titles, and presently deciphered the words, 'Victor Hugo,' on each of the thin volumes. Her interest instantly became real. Characteristically abrupt and unreflecting, she deposited her basket on the floor and, going to the book-

case, took out the slanting volume. Its title was "Les Rayons et Les Ombres." She opened it by hazard at the following poem, which had no heading and which stood, a small triptych of print, rather solitary in the lower half of a large white page :

*Dieu qui sourit et qui donne  
Et qui vient vers qui l'attend  
Pourvu que vous soyez bonne,  
Sera content.*

*Le monde où tout étincelle,  
Mais où rien n'est enflammé,  
Pourvu que vous soyez belle,  
Sera charmé.*

*Mon cœur, dans l'ombre amoureuse,  
Où l'enivrent deux beaux yeux,  
Pourvu que tu sois heureuse,  
Sera joyeux.*

That was all. But she shook as though a miracle had been enacted. Hilda, owing partly to the fondness of an otherwise stern grandfather and partly to the vanity of her unimportant father, had finally been sent to a school attended by girls who on the average were a little above herself in station—Chetwynd's, in the valley between Turnhill and Bursley. (It was still called Chetwynd's though it had changed hands.) Among the staff was a mistress who was known as Miss Miranda—she seemed to have no surname. One of Miss Miranda's duties had been to teach optional French, and one of Miss Miranda's delights had been to dictate this very poem of Victor Hugo's to her pupils for learning by heart. It was Miss Miranda's sole French poem, and she imposed it with unfading delight on the successive generations whom she 'grounded' in French. Hilda had apparently forgotten most of her French, but as she now read the poem (for the first time in print), it re-established itself in her memory as the most lovely verse that she had ever known, and the recitations of it in Miss Miranda's small classroom came back to her with an effect beautiful and tragic. And also there was the name of Victor Hugo, which Miss Miranda's insistent enthusiasm had rendered sublime and legendary to a sensitive child! Hilda now saw the

sacred name stamped in gold on a whole set of elegant volumes ! It was marvellous that she should have turned the page containing just that poem ! It was equally marvellous that she should have discovered the works of Victor Hugo in the matter-of-fact office of Mr. Cannon ! But was it ? Was he not half-French, and were not these books precisely a corroboration of what her mother had told her ? Mr. Cannon's origin at once assumed for her the strange seductive hues of romance ; he shared the glory of Victor Hugo. Then the voices in the corridor ceased, and with a decisive movement he unlatched the door. She relinquished the book and calmly sat down as he entered.

## III

"Of course, your mother's told you ?"

"Yes."

"I had no difficulty at all. I just asked her what she was going to do about the rent-collecting."

Standing up in front of Hilda, but on his own side of the desk, Mr. Cannon smiled as a conqueror who can recount a triumph with pride, but without conceit. She looked at him with naïve admiration. To admire him was agreeable to her ; and she liked also to feel unimportant in his presence. But she fought, unsuccessfully, against the humiliating idea that his personal smartness convicted her of being shabby—of being even inefficient in one department of her existence ; and she could have wished to be magnificently dressed.

"Mrs. Lessways is a very shrewd lady—very shrewd indeed !" said Mr. Cannon, with a smile, this time to indicate humorously that Mrs. Lessways was not so easy to handle as might be imagined, and that even the cleverest must mind their p's and q's with such a lady.

"Oh yes, she *is* !" Hilda agreed, with an exaggerated emphasis that showed a lack of conviction. Indeed, she had never thought of her mother as a *very* shrewd lady.

Mr. Cannon continued to smile in silence upon the shrewdness of Mrs. Lessways, giving little appreciative movements of the diaphragm, drawing in his lips and by consequence pushing out his cheeks like a child's ; and his eyes were all the time saying lightly : "Still, I managed her !" And

while this pleasant intimate silence persisted, the noises of the market-place made themselves prominent, quite agreeably—in particular the hard metallic stamping and slipping, on the bricked pavement under the window, of a team of cart-horses that were being turned in a space too small for their grand, free movements, and the good-humoured cracking of a whip. Again Hilda was impressed, mystically, by the strangeness of the secret relation between herself and this splendid effective man. There they were, safe within the room, almost on a footing of familiar friendship! The atmosphere was different from that of the first interview. And none knew! And she alone had brought it all about by a simple caprice!

"I was fine and startled when I saw you at our door, Mr. Cannon!" she said.

He might have said, "Were you? You didn't show it." She was half expecting him to say some such thing. But he became reflective, and began: "Well, you see——" and then hesitated.

"You didn't tell me you thought of calling."

"Well," he proceeded at last—and she could not be sure whether he was replying to her or not—"I was pretty nearly ready to buy that Calder Street property. And I thought I'd talk *that* over with your mother first! It just happened to make a good beginning, you see." He spoke with all the flattering charm of the confidential.

Hilda flushed. Under her mother's suggestion, she had been misjudging him. He had not been guilty of mere scheming. She was profoundly glad. The act of apology to him, performed in her own mind, gave her a curious delight.

"I wish she would sell," said Hilda, to whom the ownership of a slum was obnoxious.

"Very soon your consent would be necessary to any sale."

"Really!" she exclaimed, agreeably flattered, but scarcely surprised by this information. "I should consent quick enough! I can't bear to walk down the street!"

He laughed condescendingly. "Well, I don't think your mother *would* care to sell, if you ask me." He sat down.



Hilda frowned, regretting her confession and resenting his laughter.

"What will your charges be, please, Mr. Cannon?" she demanded abruptly, and yet girlishly timid. And at the same moment she drew forth her purse, which she had been holding ready in her hand.

For a second he thought she was referring to the price of rent-collecting, but the appearance of the purse explained her meaning. "Oh! There's no charge!" he said, in a low voice, seizing a penholder.

"But I must pay you something! I can't——"

"No, you mustn't!"

Their glances met in conflict across the table. She had known that he would say exactly that. And she had been determined to insist on paying a fee—utterly determined! But she could not, now, withstand the force of his will. Her glance failed her. She was disconcerted by the sudden demonstration of her inferiority. She was distressed. And then a feeling of faintness, and the gathering of a mist in the air, positively frightened her. The mist cleared. His glance seemed to say, with kindness: "You see how much stronger I am than you! But you can trust me!" The sense of adventure grew even more acute in her. She marvelled at what life was, and hid the purse like a shame.

"It's very kind of you," she murmured.

"Not a bit!" he said. "I've got a job through this. Don't forget that. We don't collect rents for nothing, you know—especially Calder Street sort of rents!"

She picked up her basket and rose. He also rose.

"So you've been looking at my Victor Hugo," he remarked, putting his right hand negligently into his pocket instead of holding it forth in adieu.

#### IV

So overset was she by the dramatic surprise of his challenging remark, and so enlightened by the sudden perception of it being perfectly characteristic of him, that her manner changed in an instant to a delicate, startled timidity. All the complex sensitiveness of her nature was expressed simultaneously in the changing tints of her face, the confusion of

her eyes and her gestures, and the exquisite hesitations of her voice as she told him about the coincidence which had brought back to her in his office the poem of her schooldays.

He came to the bookcase and, taking out the volume, handled it carelessly.

"I only brought these things here because they're nicely bound and fill up the shelf," he said. "Not much use in a lawyer's office, you know!" He glanced from the volume to her, and from her to the volume. "Ah, Miss Miranda! Yes! Well! It isn't so wonderful as all that. My father used to give her lessons in French. This Hugo was his. He thought a great deal of it." Mr. Cannon's pose exhibited pride, but it was obvious that he did not share his father's taste. His tone rather patronized his father, and Hugo too. As he let the pages of the book slip by under his thumb, he stopped, and with a very good French accent quite different from Hilda's memory of Miss Miranda's, murmured in a sort of chanting—" *Dieu qui sourit et qui donne.*"

"That's the very one!" cried Hilda.

"Ah! There you are then! You see—the bookmark was at that page. Hilda had not noticed the thin ribbon almost concealed in the jointure of the pages. "I wouldn't be a bit astonished if my father had lent her this very book! Curious, isn't it?"

It was. Nevertheless, Hilda felt that his sense of the miraculousness of life was not so keen as her own; and she was disappointed.

"I suppose you're very fond of reading?" he said.

"No, I'm not," she replied. Her spirit lifted a little courageously, to meet his with defiance, like a ship lifting its prow above the threatening billow. Her eyes wavered, but did not fall before his.

"Really! Now, I should have said you were a great reader. What do you do with yourself?" He now spoke like a brother, confident of a trustful response.

"I just waste my time," she answered coldly. She saw that he was puzzled, interested, and piqued, and that he was examining her quite afresh.

"Well," he said shortly, after a pause, adopting the

benevolent tone of an uncle or even a great-uncle, "you'll be getting married one of these days."

"I don't want to get married," she retorted obstinately, and with a harder glance.

"Then what do you want?"

"I don't know." She discovered great relief, even pleasure, in thus callously exposing her mind to a stranger.

Tapping his teeth with one thumb, he gazed at her, apparently in meditation upon her peculiar case. At last he said:

"I tell you what you ought to do. You ought to go in for phonography."

"Phonography?" She was at a loss.

"Yes; Pitman's shorthand, you know."

"Oh! shorthand—yes. I've heard of it. But why?"

"Why? It's going to be the great thing of the future. There never was anything like it!" His voice grew warm and his glance scintillated. And now Hilda understood her mother's account of his persuasiveness; she felt the truth of that odd remark that he could talk the hind leg off a horse.

"But does it lead to anything?" she inquired, with her strong sense of intrinsic values.

"I should say it did!" he answered. "It leads to everything! There's nothing it won't lead to! It's the key of the future. You'll see. Look at Dayson. He's taken it up, and now he's giving lessons in it. He's got a room over his aunt's. I can tell you he staggered me. He wrote in shorthand as fast as ever I could read to him, and then he read out what he'd written, without a single slip. I'm having one of my chaps taught. I'm paying for the lessons. I thought of learning myself—yes, really! Oh! It's a thing that'll revolutionize all business and secretarial work and so on—revolutionize it! And it's spreading. It'll be the Open Sesame to everything. Anybody that can write a hundred and twenty words a minute'll be able to walk into any situation he wants—straight *into* it! There's never been anything like it. Look! Here it is!"

He snatched up a pale-green booklet from the desk and opened it before her. She saw the cryptic characters for the first time. And she saw them with his glowing eyes. In their mysterious strokes and curves and dots she saw romance,

and the key of the future ; she saw the philosopher's stone. She saw a new religion that had already begun to work like leaven in the town. The revelation was deliciously intoxicating. She was converted, as by lightning. She yielded to the ecstasy of discipleship. Here—somehow, inexplicably, incomprehensibly—here was the answer to the enigma of her long desire. And it was an answer original, strange, distinguished, unexpected, unique ; yes, and divine ! How lovely, how beatific, to be the master of this enchanted key !

“ It must be very interesting ! ” she said, low, with the venturesome shyness of a deer that is reassured.

“ I don't mind telling you this,” Mr. Cannon went on, with the fire of the prophet. “ I've got something coming along pretty soon ”—he repeated more slowly—“ I've got something coming along pretty soon, where there'll be scope for a young lady that can write shorthand *well*. I can't tell you what it is, but it's something different from anything there's ever been in this town ; *and* better.”

His eyes masterfully held hers, seeming to say : “ I'm vague. But I was vague when I told you I'd see what could be done about your mother—and look at what I did, and how quickly and easily I did it ! When I'm vague, it means a lot.” And she entirely understood that his vagueness was calculated—out of pride.

They talked about Mr. Dayson a little.

“ I must go now,” said Hilda awkwardly.

“ I'd like you to take that Hugo,” he said. “ I dare say it would interest you. . . . Remind you of old times.”

“ Oh no ! ”

“ You can return it when you like.”

Her features became apologetic. She had too hastily assumed that he wished to force a gift on her.

“ Please ! ” he ejaculated. No abuse this time of moral authority ! But an appeal, boyish, wistful, supplicating. It was irresistible, completely irresistible. It gave her an extraordinary sense of personal power.

He wrapped up the book for her in a sheet of blue “ draft ” paper that noisily crackled. While he was doing so, a tiny part of her brain was, as it were, automatically exploring a box of old books in the attic at home and searching therein

for a Gasc's French-English Dictionary which she had used at school and never thought of since.

"My compliments to your mother," he said at parting.

She gazed at him questioningly.

"Oh! I was forgetting," he corrected himself, with an avuncular, ironic smile. "You're not supposed to have seen me, are you?"

Then she was outside in the din; and from thrilling altitudes she had to bring her mind to marketing. She hid under apples the flat blue parcel in the basket.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE EDITORIAL SECRETARY

#### I

**A**RTHUR DAYSON, though a very good short-hand writer, and not without experience as a newspaper reporter and sub-editor, was a nincompoop. There could be no other explanation of his bland, complacent indifference as he sat poking at a coke stove one cold night of January, 1880, in full view of a most marvellous and ravishing spectacle. The stove was in a room on the floor above the offices labelled as Mr. Q. Karkeek's ; its pipe, supported by wire stays, went straight up nearly to the grimy ceiling, and then turned horizontally and disappeared through a clumsy hole in the scorched wall. It was a shabby stove, but not more so than the other few articles of furniture—a large table, a small desk, three deteriorated cane-chairs, two gas-brackets, and an old copying-press on its rickety stand. The sole object that could emerge brightly from the ordeal of the gas-flare was a splendid freshly printed blue poster gummed with stamp-paper to the wall : which poster bore the words, in vast capitals of two sizes : "The Five Towns Chronicle and Turnhill Guardian." Copies of this poster had also been fixed face outwards, on the two curtainless black windows, to announce to the Market Square what was afoot in the top storey over the ironmonger's.

A young woman, very soberly attired, was straining at the double iron-handles of the copying-press. Some copying-presses have a screw so accurately turned and so well oiled, and handles so massively like a fly-wheel, that a touch will send the handles whizzing round and round till they stop suddenly, and then one slight wrench more, and the letters are duly copied ! But this was not such a press. It had been outworn in Mr. Karkeek's office ; rust had intensified its original

defects of design, and it produced the minimum of result with the maximum of means. Nevertheless, the young woman loved it. She clenched her hands and her teeth, and she frowned, as though she loved it. And when she had sufficiently crushed the letter-book in the press, she lovingly unscrewed and drew forth the book; and with solicitude she opened the book on the smaller table, and tenderly detached the blotting-paper from the damp tissue paper, and at last extracted the copied letter and examined its surface.

"Smudged!" she murmured, tragic.

And the excellent ass Dayson, always facetiously cheerful, and without a grain of humour, remarked:

"Copiousness with the H<sub>2</sub>O, Miss Lessways, is the father of smudged epistles. I'm ready to go through these proofs with you as soon as you are."

He was over thirty. He had had affairs with young women. He reckoned that there remained little for him to learn. He had deliberately watched this young woman at the press. He had clearly seen her staring under the gas-jet at the copied letter. And yet her in fierce muscular movements, and in her bendings and straightenings, and in her delicate caressings, and in her savage scowlings and wrinklins, and in her rapt gazings, and in all her awful absorption, he had quite failed to perceive the terrible eager outpouring of a human soul, mighty, passionate, and wistful. He had kept his eyes on her slim bust and tight-girded waist that sprung suddenly neat and smooth out of the curving skirt-folds, and it had not occurred to him to exclaim even in his own heart: "With your girlishness and your ferocity, your intimidating seriousness and your delicious absurdity, I would give a week's wages just to take hold of you and shake you!" No! The dolt had seen absolutely naught but a conscientious female beginner learning the duties of the post which he himself had baptized as that of 'editorial secretary.'

## II

Hilda was no longer in a nameless trouble. She no longer wanted she knew not what. She knew beyond all questioning that she had found that which she had wanted. For nearly a year she had had lessons in phonography from Miss

Dayson's nephew, often as a member of a varying night-class, and sometimes alone during the day. She could not write shorthand as well as Mr. Dayson, and she never would, for Mr. Dayson had the shorthand soul; but, as the result of sustained and terrific effort, she could write it pretty well. She had grappled with Isaac Pitman as with Apollyon and had not been worsted. She could scarcely believe that in class she had taken down at the rate of ninety words a minute Mr. Dayson's purposely difficult political speechifyings (which always contained the phrase 'capital punishment,' because 'capital punishment' was a famous grammalogue); but it was so, Mr. Dayson's watch proved it.

About half-way through the period of study, she had learnt from Mr. Cannon, on one of his rare visits to her mother's, something about his long-matured scheme for a new local paper. She had at once divined that he meant to offer her some kind of a situation in the enterprise, and she was right. Gratitude filled her. Mrs. Lessways, being one of your happy-go-lucky, broad-minded women, with an experimental disposition—a disposition to let things alone and see how they will turn out—had made little objection, though she was not encouraging.

Instantly the newspaper had become the chief article of Hilda's faith. She accepted the idea of it as a nun accepts the sacred wafer, in ecstasy. Yet she knew little about it. She was aware that Mr. Cannon meant to establish it first as a weekly, and then, when it had grown, to transform it into a daily and wage war with that powerful monopolist "The Staffordshire Signal," which from its offices at Hanbridge covered the entire district. The original title had been "The Turnhill Guardian and Five Towns General Chronicle," and she had approved it; but when Mr. Cannon, with a view to the intended development, had inverted the title to "The Five Towns Chronicle and Turnhill Guardian," she had enthusiastically applauded his deep wisdom. Also she had applauded his project of moving, later on, to Hanbridge, the natural centre of the Five Towns. This was nearly the limit of her knowledge. She neither knew nor cared anything about the resources or the politics or the programme or the prospects of the paper. To her all newspapers were much alike.

She did not even explore, in meditation, the extraordinary psychology of Mr. Cannon—the man whose original energy and restless love of initiative was leading him to found a newspaper on the top of a successful but audaciously irregular practice as a lawyer. She incuriously and with religious admiration accepted Mr. Cannon as she accepted the idea of the paper. And being, of course, entirely ignorant of journalism, she was not in a position to criticize the organizing arrangements of the newspaper. Not that these would have seemed excessively peculiar to anybody familiar with the haphazard improvisations of minor journalism in the provinces! She had indeed, in her innocence, imagined that the basic fact of a newspaper enterprise would be a printing-press; but when Mr. Dayson, who had been on the "Signal" and on sundry country papers in Shropshire, assured her that the majority of weekly sheets were printed on jobbing presses in private hands, she corrected her foolish notion.

Her sole interest—but it was tremendous!—lay in what she herself had to do—namely, take down from dictation, transcribe, copy, classify, and keep letters and documents, and occasionally correct proofs. All beyond this was misty, for her, and she never adjusted her sight in order to pierce the mist.

Save for her desire to perfect herself in her duties, she had no desire. She was content. In the dismal, dirty, untidy, untidiable, uncomfortable office, arctic near the windows, and tropic near the stove, with dust on her dress and ink on her fingers and the fumes of gas in her quivering nostrils, and her mind strained and racked by an exaggerated sense of her responsibilities, she was in heaven! She who so vehemently objected to the squalid mess of the business of domesticity, revelled in the squalid mess of this business. She whose heart would revolt because Florrie's work was never done, was delighted to wait to all hours on the convenience of men who seemed to be the very incarnation of incalculable change and caprice. And what was she? Nothing but a clerk, at a commencing salary of fifteen shillings per week! Ah! But she was a priestess! She had a vocation which was unsoiled by the economic excuse. She was a pioneer. No young woman had ever done what she was doing. She

was the only girl in the Five Towns who knew shorthand. And in a fortnight (they said) the paper was to come out !

## III

At the large table which was laden with prodigious, heterogeneous masses of paper and general litter, she bent over the proofs by Mr. Dayson's side. He had one proof ; she had a duplicate ; the copy lay between them. It was the rough galley of a circular to the burgesses that they were correcting together. Reading and explaining aloud, he inscribed the cabalistic signs of correction in the margin of his proof, and she faithfully copied them in the margin of hers, for practice.

" l.c.," he intoned.

" What does that mean ? "

" Lower case," he explained grandiosely, in the naïve vanity of his knowledge. " Small letter ; not a capital."

" Thank you," she said, and, writing " l.c.," noted in her striving brain that ' lower case ' meant a small letter instead of a capital ; but she knew not why, and she did not ask ; the reason did not trouble her.

" I think we'll put ' enlightened ' there, before ' public.' Ring it, will you."

" Ring it ? Oh ! I see ! "

" Yes, put a ring round the word in the margin. That's to show it isn't the intelligent compositor's mistake, you see !"

Then there was a familiar and masterful footstep on the stairs, and the attention of both of them wavered.

## IV

Arthur Dayson and his proof-correcting lost all interest and all importance for Hilda as Mr. Cannon came into the room. The unconscious, expressive gesture, scornful and abrupt, with which she neglected them might have been terribly wounding to a young man more sensitive than Dayson. But Dayson in his self-sufficient, good-natured mediocrity, had the hide of an alligator. He even judged her movement quite natural, for he was a flunkey born. Hilda gazed at her master with anxiety as he deposited his black walking-stick in



the corner behind the door and loosed his white muffler and large overcoat (which Dayson called an 'immensikoff'). She thought the master looked tired and worried. Supposing he fell ill at this supreme juncture! The whole enterprise would be scotched, and not forty Daysons could keep it going! The master was doing too much—law by day and journalism by night. They were perhaps all doing too much, but the others did not matter. Nevertheless, Mr. Cannon advanced to the table buoyant and faintly smiling, straightening his shoulders back, proudly proving to himself and to them that his individual force was inexhaustible. That straightening of the shoulders always affected Hilda as something wistful, as almost pathetic in its confident boyishness. It made her feel maternal and say to herself (but not in words) with a sort of maternal superiority: "How brave he is, poor thing!" Yes, in her heart she would apply the epithet 'poor thing' to this grand creature whose superiority she acknowledged with more fervour than anybody. As for the undaunted straightening of the shoulders, she adopted it, and after a time it grew to be a characteristic gesture with her.

"Well?" Mr. Cannon greeted them.

"Well," said Arthur Dayson, with a factitious air of treating him as an equal, "I've been round to Bennion's and made it clear to him that if he can't guarantee to run off a maximum of two thousand of an eight-page sheet we shall have to try Clayhanger at Bursley, even if it's the last minute."

"What did he say?"

"Grunted."

"I shall risk two thousand, any way."

"Paper delivered, governor?" Dayson asked in a low voice, leering pawkily, as though to indicate that he was a man who could be trusted to think of everything.

"Will be to-morrow, I think," said Mr. Cannon. "Got that letter ready, Miss Lessways?"

Hilda sprang into life.

"Yes," she said, handing it diffidently. "But if you'd like me to do it again—you see it's——"

"Plethora of H<sub>2</sub>O," Dayson put in, indulgent.

"Oh no!" Mr. Cannon decided. Having read the letter,

he gave it to Dayson. "It doesn't matter, but you ought to have signed it before it was copied in the letter-book."

"Gemini! Miss!" murmured Dayson, glancing at Hilda with uplifted brows.

The fact was that both of them had forgotten this formality. Dayson took a pen, and after describing a few flourishes in the air, about a quarter of an inch above the level of the paper, he magnificently signed: "Dayson & Co." Such was the title of the proprietorship. Just as Karkeek was Mr. Cannon's dummy in the law, so was Dayson in the newspaper business. But whereas Karkeek was privately ashamed, Dayson was proud of his rôle, which gave him the illusion of power and glory.

"Just take this down, will you," said Mr. Cannon.

Hilda grasped at her notebook and seized a pencil, and then held herself tense to receive the message, staring downwards at the blank page. Dayson lolled in his chair, throwing his head back. He knew that the presence of himself, the great shorthand expert, made Hilda nervous when she had to write from dictation; and this flattered his simple vanity. Hilda hated and condemned her nervousness, but she could not conquer it.

Mr. Cannon, standing over the table, pushed his hat away from his broad, shining forehead, and then, meditative, absently lifted higher his carefully tended hand and lowered the singing gas-jet, only to raise it again.

"Mr. Ezra Brunt. Dear Sir, Re advertisement. With reference to your letter replying to ours, in which you inquire as to the circulation of the above newspaper, we beg to state that it is our intention to print four thousand of——"

"Two thousand," Hilda interrupted confidently.

Unruffled, Mr. Cannon went on politely: "No—four thousand of the first number. Our representative would be pleased to call upon you by appointment. Respectfully yours.—You might sign that, Dayson, and get it off to-night. Is Sowter here?"

For answer, Dayson jerked his head towards an inner door. Sowter was the old clerk who had first received Hilda into the offices of Mr. Q. Karkeek. He was earning a little

extra money by clerical work at nights in connection with the advertisement department of the new organ.

Mr. Cannon marched to the inner door and opened it. Then he turned and called :

"Dayson—a moment."

"Certainly," said Dayson, jumping up. He planted his hat doggishly at the back of his head, stuck his hands into his pockets, and swaggered after his employer.

The inner door closed on the three men. Hilda, staring at the notebook, blushing and nibbling at the pencil, was left alone under the gas. She could feel her heart beating violently.

## CHAPTER VIII

### JANET ORGREAVE

#### I

“**O**UR friend is waiting for that letter to Brunt,” said Arthur Dayson, emerging from the inner room a little later.

“In one moment,” Hilda replied coldly, though she had not begun to write the letter.

Dayson disappeared, nodding.

She resented his referring to Mr. Cannon as ‘our friend,’ but she did not know why, unless it was that she vaguely regarded it as presumptuous, or, in the alternative, if he meant to be facetious, as ill-bred, on the part of Arthur Dayson. She chose a sheet of paper, and wrote the letter in longhand, as quickly as she could, but with arduous care in the formation of every character ; she wrote with the whole of her faculties fully applied. Even in the smallest task she could not economize herself ; she had to give all or nothing. When she came to the figures—4,000—she intensified her ardour, lavishing enormous unnecessary force ; it was like a steam-hammer cracking a nut. Her conscience had instantly and finally decided against her. But she ignored her conscience. She knew and owned that she was wrong to abet Mr. Cannon’s deception. And she abetted it. She would have abetted it if she had believed that the act would involve her in everlasting damnation,—not solely out of loyalty to Mr. Cannon ; only a little out of loyalty ; chiefly out of mere unreasoning pride and obstinate adherence to a decision.

The letter finished, she took it into the inner room, where the three men sat in mysterious conclave. Mr. Cannon read it over, and then Arthur Dayson borrowed the old clerk’s vile pen, and, with the ceremonious delays due to his sense of his own importance, flourishingly added the signature.

When she came forth she heard a knock at the outer door.

"Come in," she commanded defiantly, for she was still unconsciously in the defiant mood in which she had offered the lying letter to Mr. Cannon.

## II

A well-dressed, kind-featured, and almost beautiful young woman, of about the same age as Hilda, opened the door, with a charming gesture of diffidence.

For a second the two gazed at each other astounded.

"Well, Hilda, of all the——!"

"Janet!"

It was an old schoolfellow, Janet Orgreave, daughter of Osmond Orgreave, a successful architect at Bursley. Janet had passed part of her schooldays at Chetwynd's; and with her brother Charlie she had also attended Sarah Gailey's private dancing-class (famous throughout Turnhill, Bursley, and Hanbridge) at the same time as Hilda. She was known, she was almost notorious, as a universal favourite. By instinct, without taking thought, she pleased everybody, great and small. Nature had spoiled her, endowing her with some beauty, and undeniable elegance, and abundant sincere kindness. She had only to smile, and she made a friend; it cost her nothing. She smiled now, and produced the illusion, not merely in Hilda but in herself also, that her pleasure in this very astonishing encounter was quite peculiarly poignant.

They shook hands, as women of the world.

"Did you know I was here?" Hilda questioned, characteristically on her guard, with a nervous girlish movement of the leg that perhaps sinned against the code of authentic worldliness.

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Janet.

"Well, I am! I'm engaged here."

"How splendid of you!" said Janet enthusiastically, with no suggestion whatever in her tone that Hilda's situation was odd, or of dubious propriety, or aught but enviable.

But Hilda surveyed her with secret envy, transient yet real. In the half-dozen years that had passed since the days of the dancing-class, Janet had matured. She was now the



finished product. She had the charm of her sex, and she depended on it. She had grace and an overflowing goodness. She had a smooth ease of manner. She was dignified. And, with her furs, and her expensive veil protecting those bright apple-red cheeks, and all the studied minor details of her costume, she was admirably and luxuriously attired. She was the usual, as distinguished from the unusual, woman, brought to perfection. She represented no revolt against established custom. Doubts and longings did not beset her. She was content within her sphere: a destined queen of the home. And yet she could not be accused of being old-fashioned. None would dare to despise her. She was what Hilda could never be, had never long desired to be. She was what Hilda had definitely renounced being. And there stood Hilda, immature, graceless, harsh, inelegant, dowdy, holding the letter between her inky fingers, in the midst of all that hard masculine mess,—and a part of it, the blindly devoted subaltern, who could expect none of the ritual of homage given to women, who must sit and work and stand and strain and say ‘yes,’ and pretend stiffly that she was a sound, serviceable, thick-skinned imitation man among men! If Hilda had been a valkyrie or a saint she might have felt no envy and no pang. But she was a woman. Self-pity shot through her tremendous pride; and the lancinating stab made her inattentive even to her curiosity concerning the purpose of Janet’s visit.

## III

“I came to see Mr. Cannon,” said Janet. “The house-keeper downstairs told me he was here somewhere.”

“He’s engaged,” answered Hilda in a low voice, with the devotee’s instinct to surround her superior with mystery.

“Oh!” murmured Janet, checked.

Hilda wondered furiously what she could be wanting with Mr. Cannon.

Janet recommenced: “It’s really about Miss Gailey, you know.”

“Yes—what?”

Hilda nodded eagerly, speaking in a tone still lower and more careful.

Janet dropped her voice accordingly : " She's Mr. Cannon's sister, of course ? "

" Half-sister."

" I mean. I've just come away from seeing her." She hesitated. " I only heard by accident. So I came over with father. He had to come to a meeting of the Guardians here, or something. They've quarrelled, haven't they ? "

" Who ? Miss Gailey and Mr. Cannon ? Well, you see, she quarrels with every one." Hilda appeared to defend Mr. Cannon.

" I'm afraid she does, poor thing ! "

" She quarrelled with mother."

" Really ! When was that ? "

" Oh ! Years and years ago ! I don't know when. I was always surprised mother let me go to the class."

" It was very nice of your mother," said Janet, appreciative.

" Is she in trouble ? " Hilda asked bluntly.

" I'm afraid she is."

" What ? "

Janet suddenly gave a gesture of intimacy. " I believe she's starving ! "

" Starving ! " Hilda repeated in a blank whisper.

" Yes, I do ! I do really believe she hasn't got enough to eat. She's quarrelled with just about everybody there was to quarrel with. She suffers fearfully with rheumatism. She never goes out—or scarcely ever. You know her dancing-classes have all fallen away to nothing. I fancy she tried taking lodgers——"

" Yes, she did. I understood she was very good at house-keeping."

" She hasn't got any lodgers now. There she is, all alone in that house, and——"

" But she can't be *starving* ! " Hilda protested. At intervals she glanced at the inner door, alarmed.

" I really think she is," Janet persisted, softly persuasive.

" But what's to be done ? "

" That's the point. I've just seen her. I went on purpose, because I'd heard. . . . But I had to pretend all sorts of things to make an excuse for myself. I couldn't offer her anything, could I ? Isn't it dreadful ? "



They were much worried, these two young maids, full of health and vigour and faith, and pride and simplicity, by this startling first glimpse into one of the nether realities of existence. And they loyally tried to feel more worried than they actually were; they did their best, out of sympathy, to moderate the leaping, joyous vitality that was in them,—and did not succeed very well. They were fine, they were touching—but they were also rather deliciously amusing—as they concentrated all their resources of solemnity and of worldly experience on the tragic case of the woman whom life had defeated. Hilda's memory rushed strangely to Victor Hugo. She was experiencing the same utter desolation—but somehow less noble—as had gripped her when she first realized the eternal picture, in "*Oceana Nox*," of the pale-fronted widows who, tired of waiting for those whose barque had never returned out of the tempest, talked quietly among themselves of the lost—stirring the cinders in the fire-place and in their hearts. . . . Yet Sarah Gailey was not even a widow. She was an ageing dancing-mistress. She had once taught the grace of rhythmic movement to young limbs; and now she was rheumatic.

"Nobody but Mr. Cannon can do anything," Janet murmured.

"I'm sure he hasn't the slightest idea—not the slightest!" said Hilda half defensively. But she was saying to herself: "This man made me write a lie, and now I hear that his sister is starving—in the same town!" And she thought of his glossy opulence. "I'm quite sure of *that*!" she repeated to Janet.

"Oh! So am I!" Janet eagerly concurred. "That's why I came. . . . Somebody had to give him a hint. . . . I never dreamt of finding you, dear!"

"It is strange, isn't it?" said Hilda, the wondrous romance of things seizing her. Seen afresh, through the eyes of this charming, sympathetic acquaintance, was not Mr. Cannon's originality in engaging her positively astounding?

"I suppose *you* couldn't give him a hint?"

"Yes, I'll tell him," said Hilda. "Of course!" In spite of herself she was assuming a certain proprietorship in Mr. Cannon.

"I'm so glad!" Janet replied. "It is good of you!"

"It seems to me it's you that's good, Janet," Hilda said grimly. She thought: "Should I, out of simple kindness and charity, have deliberately come to tell a man I didn't know . . . that his sister was starving? Never!"

"He's bound to see after it!" said Janet, content.

"Why, of course!" said Hilda, clinching the affair, in an intimate, confidential murmur.

"You'll tell him to-night?"

Hilda nodded.

They exchanged a grave glance of mutual appreciation and understanding. Each was sure of the other's high esteem. Each was glad that chance had brought about the meeting between them. Then they lifted away their apprehensive solicitude for Sarah Gailey, and Janet, having sighed relief, began to talk about old times. And their voices grew louder and more free.

"Can you tell me what time it is?" Janet asked, later. "I've broken the spring of my watch, and I have to meet father at the station at ten-fifteen."

"I haven't a notion!" said Hilda, rather ashamed.

"I hope it isn't ten o'clock."

"I could ask," said Hilda hesitatingly. The hour, for aught she knew, was nine, eleven, or even midnight. She was oblivious of time.

"I'll run," said Janet, preparing to go. "I shall tell Charlie I've seen you, next time I write to him. I'm sure he'll be glad. And you must come to see us. You really must, now! Mother and father will be delighted. Do you still recite, like you used to?"

Hilda shook her head, blushing.

She made no definite response to the invitation, which surprised, agitated, and flattered her. She wanted to accept it, but she was convinced that she never would accept it. Before departing, Janet lifted her veil, with a beautiful gesture, and offered her lips to kiss. They embraced affectionately. The next moment Hilda, at the top of the dim, naked, resounding stair, was watching Janet descend—a figure infinitely stylish and agreeable to the eye.

## CHAPTER IX IN THE STREET

### I

A FEW minutes later, just as Hilda had sealed up the last of the letters, Mr. Cannon issued somewhat hurriedly out of the inner room, buttoning his overcoat at the neck.

"Good night," he said, and took his stick from the corner where he had placed it.

"Mr. Cannon!"

"Well?"

"I wanted to speak to you."

"What is it? I'm in a hurry."

She glanced at the inner door, which he had left open. From beyond that door came the voices of Arthur Dayson and the old clerk; Hilda lacked the courage to cross the length of the room and deliberately close it, and though Mr. Cannon did not seem inclined to move, his eyes followed the direction of hers and he must have divined her embarrassment. She knew not what to do. A crisis seemed to rise up monstrous between them in an instant. She was trembling, and in acute trouble.

"It's rather important," she said timidly, but not without an unintentional violence.

"Well, to-morrow afternoon."

He, too, was apparently in a fractious state. The situation was perhaps perilous. But she could not allow her conduct to be influenced by danger or difficulty, which indeed nearly always had the effect of confirming her purpose. If something had to be done, it had to be done—and let that suffice! He waited, impatient, for her to agree and allow him to go.

"No," she answered, with positive resentment in her clear voice. "I must speak to you to-night. It's very important."

He made with his tongue an inarticulate noise of controlled exasperation.

"If you've finished, put your things on and walk along with me," he said.

She hurried to obey, and overtook him as he slowly descended the lower flight of stairs. She had buttoned her jacket and knotted her thick scarf, and now, with the letters pressed tightly under her arm lest they should fall, she was pulling on her gloves.

"I have an appointment at the Saracen's," he said mildly, meaning the Saracen's Head—the central rendezvous of the town, where Conservative and Liberal met on neutral ground.

## II

He turned to the left, toward the High Street and the great cleared space out of which the cellarage of the new Town Hall had already been scooped. He carried his thick gloves in his white and elegant hand, as one who did not feel the frost. She stepped after him. Their breaths whitened the keen air. She was extremely afraid, and considered herself an abject coward, but she was determined to the point of desperation. He ought to know the truth, and he ought to know it at once: nothing else mattered. She reflected in her terror: "If I don't begin right off, he will be asking me to begin, and that will be worse than ever." She was like one who, having boastfully undertaken to plunge into deep, cold water from a height, has climbed to the height, and measured the fearful distance, and is sick, and dares not leap, but knows that he must leap.

"I suppose you know Miss Gailey is practically starving," she said abruptly, harshly, staring at the gutter.

She had leapt. Life seemed to leave her. She had not intended to use such words, nor such a tone. She certainly did not suppose that he knew about Miss Gailey's condition. She had affirmed to Janet Orgreave her absolute assurance that he did not know. As for the tone, it was accusing, it was brutal, it was full of the unconscious and terrible clumsy cruelty of youth.

"What?" His head moved sharply sideways, to look at her.

"Miss Gailey—she's starving, it seems!" Hilda said timidly now, almost apologetically. "I felt sure you didn't know. I thought *some* one should tell you."

"What do you mean—starving?" he asked gruffly.

"Not enough to eat," she replied, with the direct simplicity of a child.

"And how did this tale get about?"

"It's true," she said. "I was told to-night."

"Who told you?"

"A friend of mine—who's seen her!"

"But who?"

"It wouldn't be right for me to tell you who."

They walked on in an appalling silence to the corner of the Square and the High Street.

"Here's the letter-box," he said, stopping.

She dropped the letters with nervous haste into the box. Then she looked up at him appealingly. In the brightness of the starry night she saw that his face had a sardonic, meditative smile. The middle part of the lower lip was pushed out, while the corners were pulled down—an expression of scornful disgust. She burst out:

"Of course, I know very well it's not your fault. I know, if you'd *known* . . . but what with her never seeing you, and perhaps people not caring to——"

"I'm very much obliged to you," he interrupted her quietly, still meditative. He was evidently sincere. His attitude was dignified. Many men would have been ashamed, humiliated, even though aware of innocence. But he contrived to rise above such weakness. She was glad; she admired him. And she was very glad also that he did not deign to asseverate that he had been ignorant of his half-sister's plight. Naturally he had been ignorant!

### III

She was suddenly happy; she was inspired by an unreasoning joy. She was happy because she was so young and fragile and inexperienced, and he so much older, and more powerful and more capable. She was happy because she was a mere girl and he a mature and important male. She thought their relation in that moment exquisitely beautiful. She was



happy because she had been exceedingly afraid and the fear had gone. The dark Square and far-stretching streets lay placid and void under the night, surrounding their silence in a larger silence: and because of that also she was happy. A policeman with his arms hidden under his cloak marched unhasting downwards from the direction of the Bank.

"Fine night, officer," said Mr. Cannon cordially.

"Yes, sir. Good night, sir," the policeman responded, with respect and sturdy self-respect, his footsteps ringing onwards.

And the sight and bearing of this hardy, frost-defying policeman watching over the town, and the greetings between him and Mr. Cannon—these, too, seemed strangely beautiful to Hilda. And then a train reverberated along its embankment in the distance, and the gliding procession of yellow windows was divided at regular intervals by the black silhouettes of the scaffolding-poles of the new Town Hall. Beautiful! She was filled with a delicious sadness. It was Janet's train. In some first-class compartment Janet and her father were shut together, side by side, intimate, mutually understanding. Again, a beautiful relation! From the summit of a high kiln in the middle distance, flames shot intermittently forth, formidable. Crockery was being fired in the night: and unseen the fireman somewhere flitted about the mouths of the kiln. And here and there in the dim faces of the streets a window shone golden . . . there were living people behind the blind! It was all beautiful, joy-giving. The thought of her mother fidgeting for her return home was delightful. The thought of Mr. Cannon and Miss Gailey, separated during many years, and now destined to some kind of reconciliation, was indescribably touching, and beautiful in a way that she could not define.

"I was only thinking the other day," said Mr. Cannon, treating her as an equal in years and wisdom—"I was only thinking I'd got the very thing for my half-sister—the very opening for her—a chance in a thousand, if only she'd . . ." It was unnecessary for him to finish the sentence.

"And is it too late now?" Hilda asked eagerly.

"No," he said. "It isn't too late. I shall go round and see her to-morrow morning first thing. It wouldn't do

for me to go to-night—you see—might seem too odd.”

“Yes,” Hilda murmured. “Well, good night.”

They separated. She knew that he was profoundly stirred. Nevertheless, he had inquired for no further details concerning Miss Gailey. He was too proud, and beneath his inflexibility too sensitive, to do so. He meant to discover the truth for himself. He had believed—that was the essential. His behaviour had been superb. The lying letter to Ezra Brunt was a mere peccadillo, even if it was that, even if it was not actually virtuous.

She walked off rapidly, trying to imitate the fine, free, calmly defiant bearing of Mr. Cannon and the policeman.

#### IV

“Florrie gone to bed?” she asked briskly of her mother, who was fussing about her in the parlour, pretending to be fretful, but secretly enchanted to welcome her, with a warm fire and plenteous food, back again into the house. And Hilda, too, was enchanted at her reception.

“Florrie gone to bed? I should just think Florrie has gone to bed. Half-past ten and after! Eh my! This going out after tea. I never heard of such doings. Now do warm your feet.”

“I should have been home sooner, only something happened,” said Hilda.

“Oh!” Mrs. Lessways exclaimed indifferently. She had in fact no curiosity as to the affairs of Dayson & Company. The sole thing that interested her was Hilda’s daily absence and daily return. She seemed quite content to remain in ignorance of what Hilda did in the mysterious office. Her conversation, profuse when she was in good spirits, rarely went beyond the trifling separate events of existence, personal and domestic—the life of the house hour by hour and minute by minute. It was often astounding to Hilda that her mother never showed any sign of being weary of these topics, nor any desire to discover other topics.

“Yes,” said Hilda. “Miss Gailey——”

Mrs. Lessways became instantly a different creature.

“And does he know?” she asked blankly, when Hilda had informed her of Janet’s visit and news.

"Yes. I told him—of course."

"You?"

"Well, somebody had to tell him," said Hilda, with an affectation of carelessness. "So I told him myself."

"And how did he take it?"

"Well, how should he take it?" Hilda retorted largely. "He *had* to take it! He was much obliged, and he said so."

Mrs. Lessways began to weep.

"Whatever's the matter?"

"I was only thinking of poor Sarah!" Mrs. Lessways answered the implied rebuke of Hilda's brusque question.

"I shall go and see her to-morrow morning."

"But, mother, don't you think you'd better wait?"

Mrs. Lessways spoke up resolutely: "I shall go and see Sarah Gailey to-morrow morning, and let that be understood! I don't need my daughter to teach me when I ought to go and see my friends and when I oughtn't. . . . I knew Sarah Gailey before your Mr. Cannon was born."

"Oh, very well! Very well!" Hilda soothed her lightly.

"I shall tell Sarah Gailey she's got to reckon with me, whether she wants to or not! That's what I shall tell Sarah Gailey!" Mrs. Lessways wiped her eyes.

"Mother," Hilda asked, when they had gone upstairs, "did you wind the clock?"

"I don't think I did," answered the culprit uncertainly from her bedroom door.

"Mother, how tiresome you are! Night before last you wouldn't let me touch it. You said you preferred to do it yourself. And now I shall be waiting for it to strike to-morrow morning, to get up—lend me that candle, do!"

She tripped down to the lobby gladly, and opened the big door of the clock, and put her hand into the dark cavity and, grimacing, hauled up the heavy weights. This forgetfulness of her mother's somehow increased her extraordinary satisfaction with life. She remounted the shadowy stairs on the wings of a pure and ingenuous elation.

## CHAPTER X

### MISS GAILEY IN DECLENSION

#### I

**K**NOWING whom she was to meet, Hilda came home to tea, on the next day but one, with a demeanour whose characteristics were heightened by nervousness. The weather was still colder, and she had tied the broad ribbons of her small bonnet rather closely under her chin, the double bow a little to the left. A knitted bodice over the dress and under the jacket made the latter tighter than usual, so that the fur edges of it curved away somewhat between the buttons, and all the upper part of the figure seemed to be too strictly confined, while the petticoats surged out freely beneath. A muff, brightly coloured to match the skirt and the bonnet and her cheeks, completed the costume. She went into the house through the garden and delicately stamped her feet on the lobby tiles, partly to warm them and shake off a few bits of snow, and partly to announce clearly her arrival. Then, just as she was, hands in muff, she entered the parlour. She was tingling with keen, rosy life, and with the sense of youthful power. She had the deep, unconscious conviction of the superiority of youth to age. And there were the two older women, waiting for her, as it were on the defensive, and as nervous as she!

"Good afternoon, Miss Gailey," she said, with a kind and even very cordial smile, and heartily shook the flaccid, rheumatic hand that was primly held out to her. And yet in spite of herself, perhaps unknown to herself, there was in her tone and her smile and her vigorous clasp something which meant, "Poor old thing!" pityingly, indulgently, scornfully.

She had not spoken to Miss Gailey, and she had scarcely seen her, since the days of the dancing-class. A woman who is in process of losing everything but her pride can disappear

from view as easily in a small town as in a great city ; her acquaintances will say to each other, " I haven't met So-and-so lately. I wonder . . ." And curiosity will go no further. And in a short time her invisibility will cease to excite any remark, except, " She keeps herself to herself nowadays." To Hilda Miss Gailey appeared no older ; her brown hair had very little grey in it, and her skin was fairly smooth and well-preserved. But she seemed curiously smaller, and less significant, this woman who, with a certain pedagogic air, used to instruct girls in grace and boys in gallantry, this woman who was regarded by all her pupils as the authoritative source of correctness and ease in deportment. " Now, Master Charles," Hilda could remember her saying, " will you ask me for the next polka all over again, and try not to look as if you were doing me a favour and were rather ashamed of yourself ? " She had a tongue for the sneaping of too casual boys, and girls also.

And she spoke so correctly—as correctly as she performed the figures of a dance ! Hilda, who also spoke without the local peculiarities, had been deprived of her Five Towns accent at Chetwynd's School, where the purest Kensingtonian was inculcated ; but Miss Gailey had lost hers in Kensington itself—so rumour said—many years before. And now, in her declension, she was still perfect of speech. But the authority and the importance were gone in substance : only the shadow of them remained. She had now, indeed, a manner half apologetic and half defiant, but timorously and weakly defiant. Her head was restless with little nervous movements ; her watery eyes seemed to say : " Do not suppose that I am not as proud and independent as ever I was, because I *am*. Look at my silk dress, and my polished boots, and my smooth hair, and my hands ! Can anyone find any trace of shabbiness in *me* ? " But beneath all this desperate bravery was the wistful acknowledgment, continually peeping out, that she had after all come down in the world, albeit with a special personal dignity that none save she could have kept.

## II

The two women were seated at a splendid fire. Hilda, whose nervousness was quickly vanishing, came between them to



warm her hands that were shining with cold, despite muff and gloves. "Here, mother!" she said teasingly, putting the muff and gloves in her mother's lap.

Sarah Gailey rose with slow stiffness from her chair.

"Now don't let this child disturb you, Sarah!" Mrs. Lessways protested.

"Oh no, Caroline!" said Miss Gailey composedly. "I was only getting my apron."

From a reticule on the table she drew forth a small black satin apron on which was embroidered in filoselle a spray of moss-roses. It was extremely elegant—much more so than Mrs. Lessways'—though not in quite the latest style of fashionable aprons; not being edible, it had probably been long preserved in a wardrobe, on the chance of just such an occasion as this. She adjusted the elastic round her thin waist, and sat down again. The apron was a sign that she had come definitely to spend the whole evening. It was a proof of the completeness of the reconciliation between the former friends.

As the conversation shifted from the immediate topic of the weather to the great general question of cures for chilblains, Hilda wondered what had passed between her mother and Miss Gailey, and whether her mother had overcome by mere breezy force or by guile: which details she never learnt, for Mrs. Lessways was very loyal to her former crony, and, moreover, she had necessarily to support the honour of the older generation against the younger. It seemed incredible to Hilda that this woman who sat with such dignity and such gentility by her mother's fire was she who the day before yesterday had been starving in the pride-imposed prison of her own house. Could Miss Gailey have known that Hilda knew! . . . But Hilda knew that Miss Gailey knew that she knew—and that others guessed! Such, however, was the sublime force of convention that the universal pretence of ignorance securely triumphed.

Then Florrie—changed, grown, budded, practised in the technicalities of parlours, but timid because of "company"—came in to set the tea. And Miss Gailey inspected her with the calm and omniscient detachment of a deity, and said to Caroline when she was gone that Florrie seemed a promising little thing—with the 'makings of a good servant' in her.

Afterwards the mistress recounted this judgment to Florrie, who was thereby apparently much impressed and encouraged in well-doing.

## III

"And so you're thinking of going to London, Miss Gailey?" said Hilda, during tea. The meal was progressing satisfactorily, though Caroline could not persuade Sarah to eat enough.

Miss Gailey flushed slightly, with the characteristic nervous movement of the head. Evidently her sensitiveness was extreme.

"And what do you know about it, you inquisitive little puss?" Mrs. Lessways intervened hastily, though it was she who had informed Hilda of the vague project. Somehow, in presence of her old friend, Mrs. Lessways seemed to feel herself under an obligation to play the assertive and crushing mother.

"Has Mr. Cannon mentioned it?" said Miss Gailey politely. Miss Gailey, at any rate, recognized in the most scrupulous way that Hilda was an adult, and no longer a foal-legged pupil for dancing. "Well, he seems so set on it. He came round to see me about it yesterday morning, without any warning. And he was full of it! I told you how full he was of it, didn't I, Caroline? You know how he is when anything takes him."

"Do I know how he is?" murmured Caroline, arching her eyebrows. She spoke much more broadly than either of the others.

Miss Gailey continued to Hilda, with seriousness: "It's a boarding-house that he's got control of up there. Something about a bill of sale on the furniture, I think. But perhaps you know?"

"No, I don't," said Hilda.

"Oh!" said Miss Gailey, relieved. "Well, anyhow he's bent on me taking charge of this boarding-house. He will have it it's just the thing for me. But—but I don't know!" She finished weakly.

"Every one knows you're a splendid housekeeper," said Mrs. Lessways. "Always were."

"I remember the refreshments at your annual dances," said Hilda, politely enthusiastic.

"I always attended to those myself," Miss Gailey judicially observed.

"I don't know anything about refreshments at dances," said Mrs. Lessways, "but I do know what your housekeeping is, Sarah!"

"Well, that's what George says!" Sarah simpered. "He says he never had such meals and such attention as that year he lived with me."

"I'm sure he's been sorry many a time he ever left you!" exclaimed Caroline. "Many and many a time!"

"Oh, well. . . . Relatives, you know. . . ." Sarah murmured vaguely. This was the only reference to the estrangement. She went on with more vivacity. "And then Mr. Cannon has always had ideas about boarding-houses and furnished rooms and so on. He always did say there was lots of money to be made out of them if only they were managed properly; only they never are. . . . He ought to know; he's been a bachelor long enough, and he's tried enough of them! He says he isn't at all comfortable where he is," she added, as it were aside to Caroline. "It's some people who used to let lodgings to theatre people at Hanbridge."

"Oh! *Them!*" cried Caroline.

The talk meandered into a maze of reminiscences, and Hilda had to realize her youthfulness and the very inferior range of her experience. Sarah and Caroline recalled to each other dozens of persons and events, opening up historical vistas in a manner that filled the young girl with envious respect, in spite of herself.

"Do you remember Hanbridge Theatre being built, Sarah?" questioned Caroline. "My grandfather—Hilda's great-grandfather—tendered for it—not that he got the job—but he was very old."

"Did he now? No I don't. But I dare say I was in London then."

"I dare say that would be it."

"Yes," said Sarah, turning to Hilda once more, "that's just what Mr. Cannon says. He says it isn't as if I didn't

know what London is. . . . But it's such a long time ago!" She glanced at Caroline as if for sympathy.

"Come, come, Sarah!" Caroline protested stoutly, and yet with a care for Sarah's sensitiveness. "It isn't so long ago as all that!"

"It seems so long," said Sarah, reflective; and her mouth worked uneasily. Then, after a pause: "He's so set on it?"

"Set on what? On you going to London?"

"Yes."

"And why not?"

"Well, I don't know whether I could——"

"Paw!" scoffed Caroline lightly and flatteringly. "You're younger than I am, and I'm not going to have anyone making out that I'm getting old. Now do finish that bit of cake."

"No, thank you, Caroline. I really couldn't."

"Not but what I should be sorry enough to lose you," Caroline concluded. "There's no friends like the old friends."

"Ah! No!" Sarah thickly muttered, gazing with her watery eyes at a spot on the white diaper.

"Hilda, do turn down that there gas a bit," said Mrs. Lessways sharply and self-consciously. "It's fizzing." And she changed the subject.

#### IV

With a nervous exaggeration of solicitude Hilda sprang to the gas-jet. Suddenly she was drenched in the most desolating sadness. She could not bear to look at Miss Gailey; and further, Miss Gailey seemed unreal to her, not an actual woman, but an abstract figure of sorrow that fancy had created. A few minutes previously Hilda had been taking pride in the tact and the enterprise of George Cannon, who possessed a mysterious gift of finding an opportunity for everybody who needed it. He had set Hilda on her feet; and he was doing the same for his half-sister, and with such skilful diplomacy that Miss Gailey was able to pretend to herself and to others that George Cannon, and not Sarah Gailey, was the obliged person. But now Hilda saw Sarah Gailey afraid to go to London, and George Cannon pushing her forward with all the ruthless strength of his enterprising spirit. And the sight was extraordinarily, incomprehensibly

tragic. Sarah Gailey's timorous glance seemed to be saying : " I am terrified to go. It isn't beyond my strength—it's beyond my spirit. But I shall have to go, and I shall have to seem glad to go. And nobody can save me ! "

And Miss Gailey's excellent silk dress, and her fine apron, and her primness and dignified manners, and her superb pretence of being undamaged struck Hilda as intolerably pathetic—so that she was obliged to look away lest she might weep at the sight of that pathos. Yes, it was a fact that she could not bear to look ! Nor could she bear to let her imagination roam into Miss Gailey's immediate past ! She said to herself : " Only yesterday morning perhaps she didn't know where her next meal was coming from. He must have managed somehow to give her some money. Only yesterday morning perhaps she didn't know where her next meal—— If I say that to myself once more I shall burst out crying ! " She balanced her spoon on her teacup and let it fall.

" Now, Miss Fidgety ! " her mother commented, with good humour. And then they all heard a knock at the front door.

" Will Florrie have heard it ? " Mrs. Lessways asked nervously. What she meant was : " Who on earth can this be ? " But such questions cannot be put in the presence of a newly reconciled old friend. It was necessary to behave as though knocks at the front door were a regular accompaniment of tea.



## CHAPTER XI

### DISILLUSION

#### I

THE entrance of George Cannon into the parlour produced a tumult greatly stimulating the vitality and the self-consciousness of all three women. Sarah Gailey's excitement was expressed in flushing, and in characteristic small futile movements of the head and hands, and in monosyllables that conveyed naught except a vague but keen apprehension. Mrs. Lessways was perturbed and somewhat apprehensive also; but she was flattered and pleased. Hilda was frankly suspicious during the first moments. She guessed that Mr. Cannon was aware of his sister's visit, and that he had come to further his own purposes. He confirmed her idea by greeting his sister without apparent surprise; but as, in response to Mrs. Lessways' insistence, he took off his great overcoat, with those large, powerful gestures which impress susceptible women and give pleasure even to the indifferent, he said casually to Sarah Gailey, "I didn't expect to meet you here, Sally. I've come to have a private word with Mrs. Lessways about putting one of her Calder Street tenants on to the pavement." Sarah laughed nervously and said that she would retire, and Mrs. Lessways said that Sarah would do no such thing, and that she was very welcome to hear all that Mr. Cannon might have to say concerning the Calder Street property.

In a minute Mr. Cannon was resplendently sitting down to the table with them, and rubbing his friendly hands, and admitting that he should not refuse a cup of tea if pressed. And Hilda received her mother's sharp instructions to get a cup and saucer from the sideboard and a spoon from the drawer. She bore these to the table like a handmaid, but like a delicate and superior handmaid, and it pleased her to

constitute herself a delicate and superior handmaid. Mr. Cannon sat next to her mother, and Hilda put down the tinkling cup and saucer on the white cloth between them ; and as she did so Mr. Cannon turned and thanked her with a confidential smile, to which she responded. They were not now employer and employee, but exclusively in the social world ; nevertheless, their business relations made an intimacy which it was piquant to feel in the home. Moreover, Sarah Gailey was opposite to them, and Hilda could not keep out of her dark eyes the intelligence : “ If she is here, if you are all amicable together, it is due to me.” Delicious and somehow perilous secret ! . . . Going back to her seat, she arranged more safely the vast overcoat which he had thrown carelessly down on her mother’s rocking-chair. It was inordinately heavy, and would have outweighed a dozen of her skimpy little jackets ; she, who would have been lost in it like a cat in a rug, enjoyed the thought of the force of the creature capable of wearing it lightly for a garment. Withal the rough, soft surface of it was agreeable to the hand. Out of one of the immense pockets hung the end of a coloured silk muffler, filmy as anything that she herself wore.

Then they were all definitely seated, and Mr. Cannon accepted his tea from the hand of Mrs. Lessways. The whiteness of his linen, the new smartness of his suit, the elegance and gallantry of his gestures—these phenomena incited the women to a responsive emulation ; they were something which it was a feminine duty to live up to. Archness reigned, especially between the hostess and the caller. Hilda answered to the mood. And Sarah Gailey, though she said little and never finished a sentence, did her best to answer to it by noddings and nervous appreciative smiles, and swift turnings of the head from one to another. When Mr. Cannon and Mrs. Lessways, in half a dozen serious words interjected among the archness, had adversely settled the fate of a whole family in Calder Street, there remained scarcely a trace, in the company’s demeanour, of the shamed consciousness that only two days before its members had been divided by disastrous enmities and that one of them had lacked the means of life.

## II

"Oh no! my dear girl! You're too modest—that's what's the matter with you," said George Cannon eagerly to his half-sister. The epithet flattered but did not allay her timidity. To Hilda it seemed mysteriously romantic.

The supreme topic had worked its way into the conversation. Uppermost in the minds of all, it seemed to have forced itself out by its own intrinsic energy, against the will of the company. Impossible to decide who first had let it forth! But George Cannon had now fairly seized it and run off with it. He was almost boyishly excited over it. The Latin strain in him animated his features and his speech. He was a poet as he talked of the boarding-house that awaited a mistress. He had pulled out of his pocket the cutting of an advertisement of it from the London "Daily Telegraph," a paper that was never seen in Turnhill. And this bit of paper, describing in four lines the advantages of the boarding-house, had the effect of giving the actual house a symbolic reality. "There it is!" he exclaimed, slapping down the paper. And there it appeared really to be. The bit of paper was extraordinarily persuasive. It compelled everybody to realize, now for the first time, that the house did in fact exist. George Cannon had an overwhelming answer to all timorous objections. The boarding-house was remunerative; boarders were at that very moment in it. The nominal proprietor was not leaving it because he was losing money on the boarding-house, but because he had lost money in another enterprise quite foreign to it, and had pledged all the contents of the boarding-house as security. The occasion was one in a thousand, one in a million. He, George Cannon, through a client, had the entire marvellous affair between his finger and thumb, and most obviously Sarah Gailey was the woman of all women for the vacant post at his disposition. Chance was waiting on her. She had nothing whatever to do but walk into the house as a regent into a kingdom, and rule. Only, delay was impossible. All was possible except delay. She would inevitably succeed; she could not fail. And it would be a family affair. . . .

Tea was finished and forgotten.

"For your own sake!" he wound up a peroration. "It

really doesn't matter to me. . . . Don't you agree with me, Mrs. Lessways?" His glance was a homage.

"Oh, you!" exclaimed Mrs. Lessways, smiling happily. "You've only got to open your mouth, and you'd talk anybody into the middle of next week."

"Mother!" Hilda mildly reproved. She was convinced now that Mr. Cannon had come on purpose to clinch the affair.

He laughed appreciatively.

"But really! Seriously!" he insisted.

And Mrs. Lessways, straightening her face, said, with slight self-consciousness: "Oh, *I* think it's worth while considering!"

"There you are!" cried Mr. Cannon to Miss Gailey.

"I should be all alone up there!" said Miss Gailey, as cheerfully as she could.

"I'll go up with you and see you into the place. I should have to come back the same night—I'm so tremendously busy just now—what with the paper and so on."

"Yes, but—I quite admit all you say, George—but——"

"Here's another idea," he broke out. "Why don't you ask Mrs. Lessways to go up with you and stay a week or two? It would be a rare change for her, and company for you."

Miss Gailey looked quickly at her old friend.

"Oh! Bless you!" said Mrs. Lessways. "I've only been to London once, and that was only for two days—before Hilda was born. I should be no use in London, at my time of life. I'm one of your home-stayers." Nevertheless, it was plain that the notion appealed to her fancy, and that she would enjoy flirting with it.

"Nonsense, Mrs. Lessways!" said George Cannon. "It would do you a world of good, and it would make all the difference to Sally."

"That it would!" Sarah agreed, still questioning Caroline with her watery, appealing eyes. In Caroline, Sarah saw her salvation, and snatched at it. Caroline could do nothing well; she had no excellence; all that Caroline could do Sarah could do better. And yet Caroline, by the mysterious virtue of her dry and yet genial shrewdness, and of the un-

stable but reliable equilibrium of her temperament, was the skilled Sarah's superior. They both knew it and felt it. The lofty Hilda admitted it. Caroline herself negligently admitted it by a peculiar, brusque, unaffected geniality of condescension towards Sarah.

"Do go, mother!" said Hilda. To herself she had been saying: "Another of his wonderful ideas!" The prospect of being alone in the house with Florrie, of being free for a space to live her own life untrammelled and throw all her ardour into her work, was inexpressibly attractive to Hilda. It promised the most delicious experience that she had ever had.

"Yes," retorted Mrs. Lessways. "And leave you here by yourself! A nice thing!"

"I shall be all right," said Hilda confidently and joyously. She was sure that the excursion to London had appealed to her mother's latent love of the unexpected, and that her faculty for accepting placidly whatever fate offered would prevent her from resisting the pressure that Sarah Gailey and Mr. Cannon would obviously exert.

"Shall you!" Mrs. Lessways muttered.

"Why not take your daughter with you, too?" Mr. Cannon suggested.

"Oh!" cried Hilda, shocked. "I couldn't possibly leave my work just now. . . . The paper just coming out. . . . You couldn't spare me." She spoke with pride, using phrases similar to those which he had used to explain to Sarah Gailey why he could not remain with her in London even for a night.

"Oh yes, I could," he answered kindly, lightly, carelessly, shattering—in his preoccupation with one idea—all her fine, loyal pretensions. "We should manage all right."

### III

She was hurt. She was mortally pierced. The blow was too cruel. She lowered her glance before his, and fixed it on the table-cloth. Her brow darkened. Her lower lip bulged out. She was the child again. He had with atrocious inhumanity reduced her to the unimportance of a child. She had bestowed on him and his interests the gift of her whole



soul, and he had said that it was negligible. And the worst was that he was perfectly unaware of what he had done. He had not even observed the symptoms of her face. He had turned at once to the older women and was continuing the conversation. He had ridden over her, and ridden on without a look behind. The conversation moved, after a pause, back to the plausible excuse for his call. He desired to see some old rent-book which would show how the doomed tenant in Calder Street had originally fallen into arrears.

"Where is that old book of Mr. Skellorn's, Hilda?" her mother asked.

She could not speak. The sob was at her throat. If she had spoken it would have burst through, and she would have been not merely the child, but the disgraced child.

"Hilda!" repeated her mother.

Her singular silence drew the attention of all. She blushed a sombre scarlet. No! She could not speak. She cursed herself. "What a little fool I am! Surely I can . . ." Useless! She could not speak. She took the one desperate course open to her, and ran out of the room, to the astonishment of three puzzled and rather frightened adults. Her shame was now notorious. "Baby! Great baby!" she gnashed at her own inconceivable silliness. Had she no pride? . . . And now she was in the gloom of the lobby, and she could hear Florrie in the kitchen softly whistling. . . . She was out in the dark lobby exactly like a foolish, passionate child. . . . She knew all the time that she could easily persuade her mother to leave her alone with Florrie in the house; she had levers to move her mother. . . . But of what use, now, to do that?

## CHAPTER XII

### THE TELEGRAM

#### I

IT was the end of February, 1880. A day resembling spring had come, illusive, but exquisite. Hilda, having started out too hurriedly for the office after the midday dinner, had had to return home for a proof which she had forgotten.

She now had the house to herself, as a kingdom over which she reigned ; for, amid all her humiliation and pensive dejection, she had been able to exert sufficient harsh force to drive her mother to London in company with Miss Gailey. She was alone, free ; and she tasted her freedom to the point of ecstasy. She conned corrected proofs at her meals : this was life. When Florrie came in with another dish, Hilda looked up impatiently from printed matter, as if disturbed out of a dream, and Florrie put on an apologetic air, to invoke pardon. It was largely pretence on Hilda's part, but it was life. Then she had the delicious anxiety of being responsible for Florrie. " Now, Florrie, I'm going out to-night, to see Miss Orgreave at Bleakridge. I shall rely on you to go to bed not later than nine. I've got the key. *I may not be back till the last train.*" " Yes, miss ! " And what with Hilda's solemnity and Florrie's impressed eyes, the ten-forty-five was transformed into a train that circulated in the dark and mysterious hour just before cockcrow. Hilda, alone, was always appealing to Florrie's loyalty. Sometimes, when discreetly abolishing some old-fashioned, work-increasing method of her mother's, she would speak to Florrie in a tone of sudden, transient intimacy, raising her for a moment to the rank of an intellectual equal as her voice hinted that her mother, after all, belonged to the effete generation.

Awkwardly, with her gloved hands, turning over the pages

of a book in which the slip-proof had been carelessly left hidden, Hilda, from her bedroom, heard Florrie come whistling down the attic stairs. Florrie had certainly heard nothing of her young mistress since the door-bang which had signalled her departure for the office. In the delusion that she was utterly solitary in the house, Florrie was whistling, not at all like a modest young woman, but like a carter. Hilda knew that she could whistle, and had several times indicated to her indirectly that whistling was undesirable ; but she had never heard her whistling as she whistled now. Her first impulse was to rush out of the bedroom and ' catch ' Florrie and make her look foolish, but a sense of honour restrained her from a triumph so mean, and she kept perfectly still. She heard Florrie run into her mother's bedroom ; and then she heard that voice, usually so timid, saying loudly, exultantly, and even coarsely : " Oh ! How beautiful I am ! How beautiful I am ! Shan't I just mash the men ! Shan't I just mash 'em ! " This new and vulgar word ' mash ' offended Hilda.

## II

She crept noiselessly to the door, which was ajar, and looked forth like a thief. The door of her mother's room was wide open, and across the landing she could see Florrie posturing in front of the large mirror of the wardrobe. The sight shocked her in a most peculiar manner. It was Florrie's afternoon out, and the child was wearing, for the first time, an old brown skirt that Hilda had abandoned to her. But in this long skirt she was no more a child. Although scarcely yet fifteen years old, she was a grown woman. She had astoundingly developed during her service with Mrs. Lessways. She was scarcely less tall than Hilda, and she possessed a sturdy, rounded figure which put Hilda's to shame. It was uncanny—the precocity of the children of the poor ! It was disturbing ! On a chair lay Florrie's new ' serviceable ' cloak, and a cheap but sound bonnet : both articles the fruit of a special journey with her aunt to Baines's drapery shop at Bursley, where there was a small special sober department for servants who were wise enough not to yield to the temptation of ' finery.' Florrie, who at thirteen and a half, had never been able to rattle one penny against another, had since then earned

some two thousand five hundred pennies, and had clothed herself and put money aside and also poured a shower of silver upon her clamorous family. Amazing feat! Amazing growth! She seized the 'good' warm cloak and hid her poor old bodice beneath it, and drew out her thick pig-tail, and shook it into position with a free gesture of the head; and on the head she poised the bonnet, and tied the ribbons under the delightful chin. And then, after a moment of hard scrutiny, danced and whistled, and cried again: "How beautiful I am! How pretty I am!"

She was. She positively did not look a bit like a drudge. She was not the Florrie of the kitchen and of the sack-apron, but a young, fledged creature with bursting bosom who could trouble any man by the capricious modesty of a gaze down-cast. The miraculous skirt, odious on Hilda, had the brightness of a new skirt. Her hands and arms were red and chapped, but her face had bloomed perfect in the kitchen like a flower in a marl-pit. It was a face that an ambitious girl could rely on. Its charms and the fluid charm of her movements atoned a thousand times for all her barbaric ignorance and crudity; the grime on her neck was naught.

Hilda watched, intensely ashamed of this spying, but she could not bring herself to withdraw. She was angry with Florrie; she was outraged. Then she thought: "Why should I be angry? The fact is I'm being mother all over again. After all, why shouldn't Florrie . . . ?" And she was a little jealous of Florrie, and a little envious of her, because Florrie had the naturalness of a savage, or of an animal unsophisticated by ideals of primness. Hilda was disconcerted at the discovery of Florrie as an authentic young woman. Florrie, more than seven years her junior! She felt experienced, and indulgent as the old are indulgent. For the first time in her life she did honestly feel old. And she asked herself—half in dismay: "Florrie has got thus far. Where am I? What am I doing?" It was upsetting.

At length Florrie took off the bonnet and ran upstairs, and shut the door of her attic. Apparently she meant to improve the bonnet by some touch. After waiting nervously a few moments, the aged Hilda slipped silently downstairs, and through the kitchen, and so by the garden, where with

their feet in mire the bare trees were giving signs of hope under the soft blue sky, into the street. Florrie would never know that she had been watched.

## III

Ten minutes later, when she went into the office of Dayson & Co., Hilda was younger than ever. It was a young, fragile girl, despite the dark frown of her intense seriousness, who with accustomed gestures poked the stove, and hung bonnet and jacket on a nail and then sat down to the loaded desk ; it was an ingenuous girl absurdly but fiercely anxious to shoulder the world's weight. She had passed a whole night in revolt against George Cannon's indignity ; she had called it, furiously, an insult. She had said to herself : " Well, if I'm so useless as all that, I'll never go near his office again." But the next afternoon she had appeared as usual at the office, meek, modest, with a smile fatigued and exquisitely resigned, and a soft voice. And she had worked with even increased energy and devotion. This kissing of the rod, this irrational instinctive humility, was a strange and sweet experience for her. Such was the Hilda of the office ; but Hilda at home, cantankerous, obstinate, and rude, had offered a remarkable contrast to her until the moment when it was decided that her mother should accompany Miss Gailey to London. From that moment Hilda at home had been an angel, and the Hilda of the office had shown some return of sturdy pride.

To-day the first number of " The Five Towns Chronicle " was to go to press. . . . The delays had been inexplicable and exasperating to Hilda, though she had not criticized them, even to herself ; they were now over. The town had no air of being excited about the appearance of its new paper. But the office was excited. The very room itself looked feverish. It was changed ; more tables had been brought into it, and papers and litter had accumulated enormously ; it was a room humanized by habitation, with a physiognomy that was individual and sympathetic.

From beyond the closed door of the inner room came the sound of men's rapid voices. Hilda could distinguish Mr. Cannon's and Arthur Dayson's ; there was a third, unfamiliar



to her. Having nothing to do, she began to make work, rearranging the contents of her table, fingering with a factitious hurry the thick bundles of proofs of correspondence from the villages (so energetically organized by the great Dayson), and the now useless 'copy,' and the innumerable letters, that Dayson was always disturbing, and the samples of encaustic tiles brought in by an inventor who desired the powerful aid of the Press, and the catalogues, and Dayson's cuttings from the Manchester, Birmingham, and London papers, and the notepaper and envelopes and cards, and Veale Chifferiel & Co.'s almanac that had somehow come up with other matters from Mr. Karkeek's office below. And then she dusted, with pursed lips that blamed the disgraceful and yet excusable untidiness of men; and then she examined, with despair and with pride, her dirty little hands, whose finger-tips all clustered together (they were now like the hands of a nice, careless schoolboy), and lightly dusted one against the other. Then she found a galley-proof under the table. It was a duplicate proof of "The Five Towns Chronicle's" leading article, dictated to her by a prodigious Arthur Dayson, in Mr. Cannon's presence, on the previous day, and dealing faithfully with "The Calder Street Scandal" and with Mr. Enville, a member of the Local Board—implicated in the said scandal. The proof was useless now, for the leader-page was made up. Nevertheless, Hilda carefully classified it "in case . . ."

## IV

On a chair was the "Daily Telegraph," which Dayson had evidently been reading, for it was blue pencilled. Hilda, too, must read it; her duty was to read it: Dayson had told her that she ought never to neglect the chance of reading any newspaper whatever, and that a young woman in her responsible situation could not possibly know too much. Which advice, though it came from a person ridiculous to her, seemed sound enough, and was in fact rather flattering. In the "Telegraph" she saw, between Dayson's blue lines, an account of a terrible military disaster. She was moved by it in different ways. It produced in her a grievous, horror-struck desolation; but it also gave her an extraordinary

sensation of fervid pleasure. It was an item of news that would have to appear in the "Chronicle," and this would mean changes in the make-up, and work at express speed, and similar delights. Already the paper was supposed to be on the machine, though in fact, as she well knew, it was not. No doubt the subject of discussion in the inner room was the disaster! . . . Yes, she was acutely and happily excited. And always afterwards, when she heard or saw the sinister word 'Majuba' (whose political associations never in the least interested her), she would recall her contradictory, delicious feelings on that dramatic afternoon.

While she was busily cutting out the news from the "Telegraph" to be ready for Arthur Dayson, there was a very timid knock at the door, and Florrie entered, as into some formidable cabinet of tyrannic rulers.

"If ye please, miss——" she began to whisper.

"Why, Florrie," Hilda exclaimed, "what have you put that old skirt on for, when I've given you mine? I told you——"

"I did put it on, miss. But there came a telegram. I told the boy you were here, but he said that wasn't no affair of his, so I brought it myself, and I thought you wouldn't care for to see me in your skirt, miss, not while on duty, miss, 'specially here like! So I up quick and changed it back."

"Telegram?" Hilda repeated the word.

Florrie, breathless after running and all this whispering, advanced in the prettiest confusion towards the throne, and Hilda took the telegram with a gesture as casual as she could manage. Florrie's abashed mien, and the arrival of the telegram, stiffened her back and steadied her hand. Imagine that infant being afraid of her, Hilda! This, too, was life! And the murmur of the men in the inner room was thrilling to Hilda's ears.

She brusquely opened the telegram and read: "Lessways, Lessways Street, Turnhill. Mother ill. Can you come?—Gailey."

## CHAPTER XIII

### HILDA'S WORLD

#### I

THE conversation in the inner room promised to be interminable. Hilda could not decide what to do. She felt no real alarm on her mother's account. Mrs. Lessways, often slightly indisposed, was never seriously ill; she possessed one of those constitutions which do not go to extremes of disease; if a malady overtook her, she invariably 'had' it in a mild form. Doubtless Sarah Gailey, preoccupied and worried by new responsibilities, desired to avoid the added care of nursing the sick. Hence the telegram. Moreover, if the case had been grave, she would not have put the telegram in the interrogative; she would have written, 'Please come at once.' No, Hilda was not unduly disturbed. Nevertheless, she had an odd idea that she ought to rush to the station and catch the next train, which left Knype at five minutes to four; this idea did not spring from her own conscience, but rather from the old-fashioned collective family conscience. But at a quarter to four, when it was already too late to catch the local train at Turnhill, the men had not emerged from the inner room; nor had Hilda come to any decision. As the departure of her mother and Miss Gailey had involved much solemn poring over time-tables, it happened that she knew the times of all the trains to London; to catch the next and last she would have to leave Turnhill at 5.55. She said that she would wait and see. Her work for the first number of the paper was practically done, but there was this mysterious conclave which fretted her curiosity and threatened exciting developments; also the Majuba disaster would mean trouble for somebody. And in any event she hated the very thought of quitting Turnhill before the "Chronicle" was definitely out. She had lived for the

moment of its publication, and she could not bear to miss it. She was almost angry with her mother ; she was certainly angry with Mrs Gailey. All the egotism of the devotee in her was aroused and irate.

Then the men came forth from the inner room, with a rather unexpected suddenness. Mr. Cannon appeared first ; and after him Mr. Enville ; lastly Arthur Dayson, papers in hand. Intimidated by the presence of the stranger, Hilda affected to be busy at her table. Mr. Enville shook hands very amicably with George Cannon, and instantly departed. As he passed down the stairs she caught sight of him ; he was a grizzled man of fifty, lean and shabby, despite his reputation for riches. She knew that he was a candidate for the supreme position of Chief Bailiff at the end of the year, and he did not accord with her spectacular ideal of a Chief Bailiff ; the actual Chief Bailiff was a beautiful and picturesque old man, with perfectly tended white whiskers, and always a flower in his coat. Further, she could not reconcile this nearly effusive friendliness between Mr. Enville and Mr. Cannon with the animadversions of the leading article which Arthur Dayson had composed, and Mr. Cannon had approved, only twenty-four hours earlier.

As Mr. Cannon shut the door at the head of the stairs, she saw him give a discreet, disdainful wink to Dayson. Then he turned sharply to Hilda, and said, thoughtful and stern :

" Your notebook, please."

Bracing herself, and still full of pride in her ability to write this mysterious shorthand, she opened her notebook, and waited with poised pencil. The mien of the two men had communicated to her an excitement far surpassing their own, in degree and in felicity. The whole of her vital force was concentrated at the point of her pencil, and she seemed to be saying to herself : " I'm very sorry, mother, but see how important this is ! I shall consider what I can do for you the very moment I am free."

Arthur Dayson coughed and plumped heavily on a chair.

## II

It was in such moments as this that Dayson really lived, with all the force of his mediocrity. George Cannon was not

a journalist ; he could compose a letter, but he had not the trick of composing an article. He felt, indeed, a negligent disdain for the people who possessed this trick, as for performers in a circus ; he certainly did not envy them, for he knew that he could buy them, as a carpenter buys tools. His attitude was that of the genuine bourgeois towards the artist : possessive, incurious, and contemptuous. Dayson, however, ignored George Cannon's attitude, perhaps did not even perceive what it was. He gloried in his performance. Accustomed to dictate extempore speeches on any subject whatever to his shorthand pupils, he was quite at his ease, quite master of his faculties, and self-satisfaction seemed to stand out on his brow like genial sweat while the banal phrases poured glibly from the cavern behind his jagged teeth ; and each phrase was a perfect model of provincial journalese. George Cannon had to sit and listen,—to approve, or at worst to make tentative suggestions.

The first phrase which penetrated through the outer brain of the shorthand writer to the secret fastness where Hilda sat in judgment on the world was this :

"The campaign of vulgar vilification inaugurated yesterday by our contemporary 'The Staffordshire Signal' against our esteemed fellow-townsmen Mr. Richard Enville . . ."

This phrase came soon after such phrases as "Our first bow to the public" . . . "Our solemn and bounden duty to the district which it is our highest ambition to serve . . ." etc. Phrases which had already occurred in the leading article dictated on the previous day.

Hilda soon comprehended that in twenty-four hours Mr. Enville, from being an unscrupulous speculator who had used his official position to make illicit profits out of the sale of land to the town for town improvements, had become the very mirror of honesty and high fidelity to the noblest traditions of local government. Without understanding the situation, and before even she had formulated to herself any criticism of the persons concerned, she felt suddenly sick. She dared not look at George Cannon, but once when she raised her head to await the flow of a period that had been arrested at a laudatory superlative, she caught Dayson winking coarsely at him. She hated Dayson for that ; George Cannon



might wink at Dayson (though she regretted the condescending familiarity), but Dayson had no right to presume to wink at George Cannon. She hoped that Mr. Cannon had silently snubbed him.

As the article proceeded there arose a crying from the Square below. A "Signal" boy, one of the earliest to break the silent habit of the Square, was bawling a fresh edition of Arthur Dayson's contemporary, and across the web of the dictator's verbiage she could hear the words: "South Africa—Details——" Mr. Cannon glanced at his watch impatiently. Hilda could see under her bent and frowning brow, his white hand moving on the dark expanse of his waistcoat.

Immediately afterwards Mr. Cannon, interrupting, said: "That'll be all right. Finish it. I must be off."

"Right you are!" said Dayson grandly. "I'll run down with it to the printer's myself—soon as it's copied."

Mr. Cannon nodded. "And tell him we've got to be on the railway bookstalls first thing to-morrow morning."

"He'll never do it."

"He must do it. I don't care if he works all night."

"But——"

"There hasn't got to be any 'buts,' Dayson. There's been a damned sight too much delay as it is."

"All right! All right!" Dayson placated him hastily.

Mr. Cannon departed.

It seemed to Hilda that she shivered, but whether with pain or pleasure she knew not. Never before had Mr. Cannon sworn in her presence. All day his manner had been peculiar, as though the strain of mysterious anxieties was changing his spirit. And now he was gone, and she had said naught to him about the telegram from Miss Gailey!

Arthur Dayson rolled oratorically on in defence of the man whom yesterday he had attacked.

And then Sowter, the old clerk, entered.

"What is it? Don't interrupt me!" snapped Dayson.

"There's the 'Signal.' . . . Latest details. . . . This here Majuba business!"

"What do I care about your Majuba?" Dayson retorted.

"I've got something more important than your Majuba."

"It was the governor as told me to give it you," said Sowter, restive.

"Well, give it me, then ; and don't waste my time !" Dayson held out an imperial hand for the sheet. He looked at Hilda as if for moral support and added, to her, in a martyred tone : "I suppose I shall have to dash off a few lines about Sowter's Majuba while you're copying out my article."

"And the governor said to remind you that Mr. Enville wants a proof of his advertisement," Sowter called out sulkily as he was disappearing down the stairs.

Hilda blushed, as she had blushed in writing George Cannon's first lie about the printing of the first issue. She had accustomed herself to lies, and really without any difficulty or hesitation. Yes ! She had even reached the level of being religiously proud of them ! But now her bullied and crushed conscience leaped up again, and in the swift alarm of the shock her heart was once more violently beating. Yet amid the wild confusion of her feelings, a mechanical intelligence guided her hand to follow Arthur Dayson's final sentences. And there shone out from her soul a contempt for the miserable hack, so dazzling that it would have blinded him—had he not been already blind.

### III

That evening she sat alone in the office. The first number of "The Five Towns Chronicle," after the most astounding adventures, had miraculously gone to press. Dayson and Sowter had departed. There was no reason why Hilda should remain—burning gas to no purpose. She had telegraphed, by favour of a Karkeek office-boy, to Miss Gailey, saying that she would come by the first train on the morrow—Saturday, and she had therefore much to do at home. Nevertheless, she sat idle in the office, unable to leave. Her whole life was in that office, and it was just when she was most weary of the environment that she would vacillate longest before quitting it. She was unhappy and apprehensive, much less about her mother than about the attitude of her conscience towards the morals of this new world of hers. The dramatic Enville incident had spoiled the pleasure which she had felt in sacrificing her formal duty as a daughter to

her duty as a clerk. She had been disillusioned. She foresaw the future with alarm.

And yet, strangely, the disillusion and the fear were a source of pleasure. She savoured them with her loyalty, that loyalty which had survived even the frightful blow of George Cannon's casual disdain at her mother's tea-table! Whatever this new world might be, it was hers, and it was precious. She would no more think of abandoning it than a young mother would think of abandoning a baby obviously imperfect. . . . Nay, she would cling to it the tighter!

George Cannon came up the stairs with his decisive and rapid step. She rose from her chair at the table as he entered. He was wearing a new overcoat, that she had never seen before, with a fine velvet collar.

"You're going?" he asked, a little breathless.

"I *was* going," she replied in her clear, timid voice implying that she was ready to stay.

"Everything all right?"

"Mr. Dayson said so."

"He's gone?"

"Yes. Mr. Sowter's gone too."

"Good!" he murmured. And he straightened his shoulders, and, putting his hands in the pockets of his trousers, began to walk about the room.

Hilda moved to get her bonnet and jacket. She moved very quietly and delicately, and, because he was there, she put on her bonnet and jacket with gestures of an almost apologetic modesty. He seemed to ignore her, so that she was able to glance surreptitiously at his face. He was now apparently less worried. Still, it was an enigmatic face. She had no notion of what he had been doing since his hurried exit in the afternoon. He might have been attending to his legal practice, or he might have been abroad on mysterious errands.

"Funny business, this newspaper business is, isn't it?" he remarked, after a moment. "Just imagine Enville, now! Upon my soul I didn't think he had it in him! . . . Of course,"—he threw his head up with a careless laugh,—“of course, it would have been madness for us to miss such a chance! He's one of the men of the future, in this town.”

"Yes," she agreed, in an eager whisper.

In an instant George Cannon had completely changed the attitude of her conscience,—by less than a phrase, by a mere intonation. In an instant he had reassured her into perfect security. It was plain, from every accent of his voice, that he had done nothing of which he thought he ought to be ashamed. Business was business, and newspapers were newspapers; and the simple truth was that her absurd conscience had been in the wrong. Her duty was to accept the standards of her new world. Who was she? Nobody! She did accept the standards of her new world, with fervour. She was proud of them, actually proud of their apparent wickedness. She had accomplished an act of faith. Her joy became intense, and shot glinting from her eyes as she put on her gloves. Her life became grand to her. She knew she was known in the town as 'the girl who could write shorthand.' Her situation was not ordinary; it was unique. Again, the irregularity of the hours, and the fact that the work never commenced till the afternoon, seemed to her romantic and beautiful. Here she was, at nine o'clock, alone with George Cannon on the second floor of the house! And who, gazing from the Square at the lighted window, would guess that she and he were there alone?

All the activities of newspaper production were poetized by her fervour. The "Chronicle" was not a poor little weekly sheet, struggling into existence anyhow, at haphazard, dependent on other newspapers for all except purely local items of news. It was an organ! It was the courageous rival of the ineffable "Signal," its natural enemy! One day it would trample on the "Signal"! And though her rôle was humble, though she understood scarcely anything of the enterprise beyond her own duties, yet she was very proud of her rôle too. And she was glad that the men were seemingly so careless, so disorderly, so forgetful of details, so—in a word—childish! For it was part of her rôle to remind them, to set them right, to watch over their carelessness, to restore order where they had left disorder. In so far as her rôle affected them, she condescended to them.

She informed George Cannon of her mother's indisposition, and that she meant to go to London the next morning, and

to return most probably in a few days. He stopped in his walk, near her. Like herself, he was not seriously concerned about Mrs. Lessways, but he showed a courteous sympathy.

"It's a good thing you didn't go to London when your mother went," he said, after a little conversation.

He did not add: "You've been indispensable." He had no air of apologizing for his insult at the tea-table. But he looked firmly at her, with a peculiar expression.

Suddenly she felt all her slimness and fragility; she felt all the girl in herself and all the dominant man in him, and all the empty space around them. She went hot. Her sight became dim. She was ecstatically blissful; she was deeply ashamed. She desired the experience to last for ever, and him and herself to be eternally moveless; and at the same time she desired to fly. Or rather, she had no desire to fly, but her voice and limbs acted of themselves, against her volition.

"Good night, then."

"But I say! Your wages. Shall I pay you now?"

"No, no! It doesn't matter in the least, thanks."

He shook hands, with a careless, good-natured smile which seemed to be saying: "Foolish creature! You can't defend yourself, and these airs are amusing. But I am benevolent." And she was ashamed of her shame, and furious against the childishness that made her frown, and lower her eyes, and escape out of the room like a mouse.



## CHAPTER XIV

### TO LONDON

#### I

**I**N the middle of the night Hilda woke up, and within a few seconds she convinced herself that her attitude to Miss Gailey's telegram had been simply monstrous. She saw it, in the darkness, as an enormity. She ought to have responded to the telegram at once; she ought to have gone to London by the afternoon train. What had there been to prevent her from knocking at the door of the inner room, and saying to Mr. Cannon, in the presence of no matter who: "I am very sorry, Mr. Cannon, but I've just had a telegram that mother is ill in London, and I must leave by the next train"? There had been nothing to prevent her! At latest she should have caught the evening train. Business was of no account in such a crisis. Her mother might be very ill, might be dying, might be dead. It was not for trifles that people sent such telegrams. The astounding thing was that she should have been so blind to her obvious duty. . . . And she said to herself, thinking with a mysterious and beautiful remorse of the last minute of her talk with Mr. Cannon: "If I had done as I ought to have done, I should have been in London, or on my way to London, instead of in the room with him there; and *that* would not have occurred!" But what 'that' was, she could not have explained. Nevertheless, Mr. Cannon's phrase, "It's a good thing you didn't go to London," still gave her a pleasure, though the pleasure was dulled.

Then she tried to reassure herself. Sarah Gailey was nervous and easily frightened. Her mother had an excellent constitution. The notion of her mother being seriously ill was silly. In a few hours she would be with her mother, and would be laughing at these absurd night-fears. In any

case there would assuredly be a letter from Sarah Gailey by the first post, so that before starting she would have exact information. She succeeded, partially, in reassuring herself for a brief space ; but soon she was more unhappy than ever in the clear conviction of her wrongdoing. Again and again she formulated, in her fancy, scenes of the immediate future, as, for example, at her mother's dying bed, and she imagined conversations and repeated the actual words used by herself and others, interminably. And then she returned to the previous day, and hundreds of times she went into the inner room and said to Mr. Cannon : " I'm very sorry, Mr. Cannon, but I've just had a telegram——" etc. Why had she not said it ? . . . Thus worked the shuttles of her mind, with ruthless, insane insistence, until she knew not whether she was awake or asleep, and the very tissues of her physical brain seemed raw.

She thought feebly : " If I got up and lighted the candle and walked about, I should end this." But she could not rise. She was netted down to the bed. And when she tried to soothe herself with other images—images of delight—she found that they had lost their power. Undressing, a few hours earlier, she had lived again, in exquisite and delicious alarm, through the last minute of her talk with Mr. Cannon ; she had gone to sleep while reconstituting those instants. But now their memory left her indifferent, even inspired repugnance. And her remorse little by little lost its mysterious beauty.

She clung to the idea of the reassuring letter which she would receive. That was her sole glint of consolation.

## II

At six she was abroad in the house, intensely alive, intensely conscious of every particle of her body, and of every tiniest operation of her mind. In less than two hours the letter would drop into the lobby ! At half-past six both she and Florrie were dressed, and Florrie, stern with the solemnity and importance of her mission, was setting forth to the Saracen's Head to order a cab to be at the door at eight o'clock.

Hilda had much to do, for it was of course necessary to

shut up the house, and the packing of her trunk had to be finished, and the trunk locked and corded, and a label found ; and there was breakfast to cook. Mrs. Lessways would have easily passed a couple of days in preparing the house for closure. Nevertheless, time, instead of flying, lagged. At seven-thirty Hilda, in the partially dismantled parlour, and Florrie in the kitchen, were sitting down to breakfast. "In a quarter of an hour," said Hilda to herself, "the post will be here." But in four minutes she had eaten the bacon and drunk the scalding tea, and in five she had carried all the breakfast-things into the kitchen, where Florrie was loudly munching over the sloppy deal table. She told Florrie sharply that there would be ample time to wash up. Then she went to her bedroom, and, dragging out her trunk, slid it unaided down the stairs. Back again in the bedroom, she carelessly glanced at the money in her purse, and then put on her things for the journey. Waiting, she stood at the window to look for the postman. Presently she saw him in the distance, he approached quickly, but spent an unendurable minute out of sight in the shop next door. When he emerged Hilda was in anguish. Had he a letter for her ? Had he not ? He seemed to waver at the gateway, and to decide to enter. . . . She heard the double blow of his drumstick baton. . . . Now in a few seconds she would know about her mother.

Proudly restraining herself, she walked with composure to the stairs. She was astonished to see Florrie bending down to pick up the letter. Florrie must have been waiting ready to rush to the front door. As she raised her body and caught sight of Hilda, Florrie flushed.

The stairs were blocked by the trunk which Hilda had left on the stair-mat for the cabman to deal with. Standing behind the trunk, Hilda held forth her hand for the letter.

"Please, miss, it's for me," Florrie whispered, like a criminal.

"For you ?" Hilda cried, startled.

In proof Florrie timidly exposed the envelope, on which Hilda plainly saw, in a coarse, scrawling masculine hand, the words "Miss Florrie Bagster." Florrie's face was a burning peony.

Hilda turned superciliously away, too proud to demand any explanations. All her alarms were refreshed by the failure of a letter from Miss Gailey. In vain she urged to herself that Miss Gailey had thought it unnecessary to write, expecting to see her; or that the illness having passed, Miss Gailey, busy, had put off writing. She could not dismiss a vision of a boarding-house in London upset from top to bottom by the grave illness of one person in it, and a distracted landlady who had not a moment even to scribble a post card. And all the time, as this vision tore and desolated her, she was thinking: "Fancy that child having a follower, at her age! She's certainly got a follower!"

The cab came five minutes before it was due.

### III

As the cab rolled through Market Square, where the Saturday stalls were being busily set up, the ironmongery building was framed for an instant by the oblong of the rattling window. Hilda seemed to see the place anew—for the first time. A man was taking down the shutters of the shop. Above that were the wire-blinds with the name of "Q. Karkeek"; and above the blinds the blue posters of the "Five Towns Chronicle." No outward sign of Mr. Cannon! And yet Mr. Cannon . . . She had an extremely disconcerting sensation of the mysteriousness of Mr. Cannon, and of the mysteriousness of all existence. Mr. Cannon existed somewhere at that moment, engaged in some activity. In a house afar off, unknown to her, her mother existed—if she was not dead! Florrie, with a bundle of personal goods on her lap, and doubtless the letter in her bosom, sat impressed and subdued, opposite to her in the shifting universe of the cab, which was moving away from the empty and silent home. Florrie was being thrown back out of luxury into her original hovel, and was accepting the stroke with the fatalism of the young and of the poor. And one day Hilda and her mother and Florrie would be united again in the home now deserted, whose heavy key was in the traveller's satchel. . . . But would they?

At the station there was a quarter of an hour to wait. Hilda dismissed Florrie, with final injunctions, and followed her trunk to the bleak platform. The old porter was very

kind. She went to the little yellow bookstall. There, under her hand, was a low pile of "The Five Towns Chronicle." Miracle! Miraculous George Cannon! She flushed with pride, with a sense of ownership, as she took a penny from her purse to pay for a copy.

"It's th' new peeper," drawled the bookstall lad, with a most foolish condescension towards the new paper.

"Lout!" she addressed him in her heart. "If you knew whom you were talking to——!"

With what pride, masked by careful indifference, she would hand the copy of the "Chronicle" to her mother! Her mother would exclaim "Bless us!" and spend a day or two in conning the thing, making singular discoveries in it at short intervals.

## IV

It was not until she had reached Euston, and driven through a tumultuous and shabby thoroughfare to King's Cross, and taken another ticket, and installed herself in another train, that Hilda began to feel suddenly, like an abyss opening beneath her strength, the lack of food. Meticulous in her clerical duties, and in many minor mechanical details of her personal daily existence, she was capable of singular negligences concerning matters which the heroic part of her despised and which did not immediately bear on a great purpose in hand. Thus, in her carelessness, she found herself with less than two shillings in her pocket after paying for the ticket to Hornsey. She thought, grimly resigned: "Never heed! I shall manage. In half an hour I shall be there, and my anxiety will be at an end."

The train, almost empty, waited forlornly in a forlorn and empty part of the huge, resounding ochreish station. Then, without warning or signal, it slipped off, as though casually, towards an undetermined goal. Often it ran level with the roofs of vague, far-stretching acres of houses—houses vile and frowzy, and smoking like pyres in the dank air. And always it travelled on a platform of brick arches. Now and then the walled road received a tributary that rounded subtly into it, and this tributary could be seen curving away, on innumerable brick arches, through the chimney-



pots, and losing itself in a dim horizon of gloom. At intervals a large, lifeless station brought the train to a halt for a moment, and the march was resumed. A clock at one of those stations said a quarter to two.

Then the name of Hornsey quickened her apprehensive heart. As she descended nervously from the train, her trunk was shot out from the guard's van behind. She went and stood over it, until the last of a series of kindly porters came along and touched his cap. When she asked for a cab, he seemed doubtful whether a cab was available, and looked uncertainly along the immense empty platform and across at other platforms. The train had wandered away. She strove momentarily to understand the reason of these great sleeping stations; but fatigue, emotional and physical, had robbed her of all intelligent curiosity in the phenomena of the mysterious and formidable city.

Presently the porter threw the trunk on his shoulder and she trudged after him up steps and over an iron bridge and down steps; and an express whizzed like a flying shell through the station and vanished. And at a wicket, in a ragged road, there actually stood a cab and a skeleton of a horse between the shafts. The driver bounced up, enheartened at sight of the trunk and the inexperienced, timid girl; but the horse did not stir in its crooked coma.

"What address, miss?" asked the cabman.

"Cedars House, Harringay Park Road."

The cabman paused in intense thought, and after a few seconds responded cheerfully: "Yes, miss."

The porter touched his cap for threepence. The lashed horse plunged forward. Hilda leaned back in the creaking and depraved vehicle, and sighed, "So this is their London!"

She found herself travelling in the direction from which she had come, parallel to the railway, down the longest street that she had ever seen. On her left were ten thousand small new houses, all alike. On her right were broken patches of similar houses, interspersed with fragments of green field and views of the arches of the railway; the conception of the horrible patience which had gone to the construction of these endless, endless arches made her feel sick.

The cab turned into another road, and another; and then

stopped. She saw the words " Cedars House " on a gateway. She could not open the door of the cab. The cabman opened it.

" Blinds down here, miss ! " he said, with appropriate mournfulness.

It seemed a rather large house ; and every blind was drawn. Had the incredible occurred, then ? Had this disaster befallen just her, of all the young women in the world ?

She saw the figure of Sarah Gailey.

" Good afternoon," she called out calmly. " Here I am. Only I'm afraid I haven't got enough to pay the cabman."

But while she was speaking she knew from Sarah Gailey's face that the worst and the most ridiculous of her night-fears had been justified by destiny.

Three days previously Mrs. Lessways had been suddenly taken ill in the street. A doctor passing in his carriage had come to her assistance and driven her home. Food eaten on the previous evening had ' disagreed ' with her. At first the case was not regarded as very serious. But as the patient did not improve in the night Miss Gailey telegraphed to Hilda. Immediately afterwards, the doctor, summoned in alarm, diagnosed peritonitis caused by a perforating cancer. Mrs. Lessways had died on the third day at eleven in the morning, while Hilda was in the train. Useless to protest that these catastrophes were unthinkable, that Mrs. Lessways had never been ill in her life ! The catastrophe had happened. And upstairs a corpse lay in proof.



## BOOK II

# HER RECOVERY

### CHAPTER I

#### SIN

##### I

FROM her bed Hilda could see the trees waving in the wind. Every morning she had thus watched them, without interest. At first the branches had been utterly bare, and beyond their reticulation had been visible the rosy façade of a new Board-school. But now the branches were rich with leafage, hiding most of the Board-school, so that only a large upper window of it could be seen. This window, upon which the sun glinted dazzlingly, threw back the rays on to Hilda's bed, giving her for a few moments the illusion of direct sunlight. The hour was eleven o'clock. On the night-table lay a tea-tray in disorder, and on the turned-down sheet some crumbs of toast. A low, nervous tap at the door caused Hilda to stir in the bed. Sarah Gailey entered hurriedly. In her bony yellowed hand she held a collection of tradesmen's account-books.

"Good morning, dear, how are you?" she asked, bending awkwardly over the bed. In the same instant she looked askance at the tray.

"I'm all right, thanks," said Hilda, lazily observing the ceiling.

"You haven't been too cold without the eider-down? I forgot to ask you before. You know I only took it off because I thought the weather was getting too warm. . . . I didn't want it for another bed. I assure you it's in the chest of drawers in my room." Sarah Gailey added the last words as if supplicating to be believed.

"You needn't tell me that," said Hilda. She was not angry, but bored, by this characteristic remark of Miss Gailey's. In three months she had learnt a great deal about the new landlady of the Cedars, that strange neurotic compound of ability, devotion, thin-skinned vanity, and sheer, narrow stupidity. "I've been quite warm enough," Hilda added as quickly as she could, lest Miss Gailey might have time to convince herself to the contrary.

"And the toast? I do hope—after all I've said to that Hettie about——"

"You see I've eaten it all," Hilda interrupted her, pointing to the plate.

Their faces were close together; they exchanged a sad smile. Miss Gailey was still bending over her, anxiously, as over a child. Yet neither the ageing and worn woman nor the flaccid girl felt the difference between them in age. Nor was Hilda in any ordinary sense ill. The explanation of Miss Gailey's yearning attitude lay in an exaggerated idea of her duty to Hilda, whose mother's death had been the result of an act of friendliness to her. If Mrs. Lessways had not come to London in order to keep company with Sarah, she might—she would, under Providence—have been alive and well that day; such was Sarah's reasoning, which, by the way, ignored certain statements of the doctor. Sarah would never forgive herself. But she sought, by an infatuated devotion, to earn the forgiveness of Caroline's daughter. Her attentions might have infuriated an earlier Hilda, or at least have been met with disdain only half concealed. But on the present actual Hilda they produced simply no effect of any kind. The actual Hilda, living far within the mysterious fastness of her own being, was too solitary, too preoccupied, and too fatigued, to be touched even by the noble beauty that distinguished the expiatory and protective gesture of the spinster, otherwise somewhat ludicrous, as she leaned across the bed and cut off the sunshine.

## II

On the morning of her mother's funeral, Hilda had gone to Hornsey Station to meet an uncle of Mrs. Lessways, who was coming down from Scotland by the night-train. She



scarcely knew him, but he was to be recognizable by his hat and his muffler, and she was to await him at the ticket-gate. An entirely foolish and unnecessary arrangement, contrived by a peculiar old man: the only possible course was to accept it.

She had waited over half an hour, between eight and nine, and in that time she had had full opportunity to understand why those suburban stations had been built so large. A dark torrent of human beings, chiefly men, gathered out of all the streets of the vicinity, had dashed unceasingly into the enclosure and covered the long platforms with tramping feet. Every few minutes a train rolled in, as if from some inexhaustible magazine of trains beyond the horizon, and, sucking into itself a multitude and departing again, left one platform for one moment empty,—and the next moment the platform was once more filled by the quenchless stream. Less frequently, but still often, other trains thundered through the station on a line removed from platforms, and these trains, too, were crammed with dark human beings, frowning in study over white newspapers. For even in 1880 the descent upon London from the suburbs was a formidable phenomenon. Train after train fled downwards with its freight towards the hidden city, and the torrent still surged, more rapid than ever, through the narrow gullet of the station. It was like the flight of some enormous and excited population from a country menaced with disaster.

Borne on and buffeted by the torrent, Hilda had seen a well-dressed epileptic youth, in charge of an elderly woman, approaching the station. He had passed slowly close by her, as she modestly waited in her hasty mourning, and she had had a fearful vision of his idiotic greenish face supported somehow like a mask at the summit of that shaky structure of limbs. He had indeed stared at her with his apelike eyes. She had watched him, almost shuddering, till he was lost amid the heedless crowd within. Then, without waiting longer for her relative, without reflecting upon what she did, she had walked trembling back to the Cedars, checked by tributaries of the torrent at every street corner. . . .

She had known nothing of the funeral. She had not had speech with the relative. She was in bed, somehow. The

day had elapsed. And in the following night, when she was alone and quite awake, she had become aware that she, she herself, was that epileptic shape; that that epileptic shape was lying in her bed and that there was none other in the bed. Nor was this a fancy of madness! She knew that she was not mad, that she was utterly sane; and the conviction of sanity only intensified her awful discovery. She passed a trembling hand over her face, and felt the skin corrupt and green. Gazing into the darkness, she knew that her stare was apelike. She had felt, then, the fullest significance of horror. In the morning she had ceased to be the epileptic shape, but the risk of re-transformation had hovered near her, and the intimidation of it was such that she had wept, aghast and broken as much by the future as by the past. She had been discovered weeping. . . .

Later, the phrase 'nervous breakdown' had lodged in her confused memory. The doctor had been very matter-of fact, logical, and soothing. Overwork, strain, loss of sleep, the journey, anxiety, lack of food, the supreme shock, the obstinate refusal of youth to succumb, and then the sudden sight of the epileptic (with whom the doctor was acquainted): thus had run the medical reasoning, after a discreet but thorough cross-examination of her; and it had seemed so plausible and so convincing that the doctor's pride in it was plain on his optimistic face as he gave the command: "Absolute repose." But to Hilda the reasoning and the resultant phrase, 'nervous breakdown,' had meant nothing at all. Words! Empty words! She knew, profoundly and fatally, the evil principle which had conquered her so completely that she had no power left with which to fight it. This evil principle was Sin; it was not the force of sins, however multifarious; it was Sin itself. She was the Sinner, convicted and self-convicted. One of the last intelligent victims of a malady which has now almost passed away from the civilized earth, she existed in the chill and stricken desolation of incommutable doom.

### III

She had sinned against her mother, and she could not make amends. The mere thought of her mother, so vivacious,

cheerful, life-loving, even-tempered, charitable, disorderly, incompetent, foolish, and yet shrewd, caused pain of such intensity that it ceased to be pain. She ought to have seen her mother before she died ; she might have seen her, had she done what was obviously her duty. It was inconceivable to her, now, that she should have hesitated to fly instantly to London on receipt of the telegram. But she had hesitated, and her mother had expired without having sight of her. All exculpatory arguments were futile against the fact itself. In vain she blamed the wording of the telegram ! In vain she tried to reason that chance, and not herself, was the evil-doer ! In vain she invoked the aid of simple common sense against sentimental fancy ! In vain she went over the events of the afternoon preceding the death, in order to prove that at no moment had she been aware of not acting in accordance with her conscience ! The whole of her conduct had been against her conscience, but pride and selfishness had made her deaf to conscience. She was the Sinner.

Her despair, except when at intervals she became the loathed epileptic shape, had been calm. Its symptoms had been, and remained, a complete lack of energy and a most extraordinary black indifference to the surrounding world. Save in the deep centre of her soul, where she agonized, she seemed to have lost all capacity for emotion. Nothing moved her, or even interested her. She sat in the house, and ate a little, and talked a little, like an automaton. She walked about the streets like a bored exile, but an exile who has forgotten his home. Her spirit never responded to the stimulus of environment. Suggestions at once lost their tonic force in the woolly cushion of her apathy. If she continued to live, it was by inertia ; to cease from life would have required an effort. She did not regret the vocation which she had abandoned ; she felt no curiosity about the fortunes of the newspaper. A tragic nonchalance held her.

After several weeks she had naturally begun to think of religion ; for the malady alone was proof enough that she had a profoundly religious nature. Miss Gailey could rarely go to Church, but one Sunday morning—doubtless with intent—she asked Hilda if they should go together, and Hilda agreed. As they approached the large, high-spired church, Hilda had

vague prickings of hope, and was thereby much astonished. But the service in no way responded to her expectations. "How silly I am!" she thought disdainfully. "This sort of thing has never moved me before. Why should it move me now?" The sermon, evangelical, was upon the Creed, and the preacher explained the emotional quality of real belief. It was a goodish sermon. But the preacher had effectually stopped the very last of those exquisite vague prickings of hope. Hilda agreed with his definition of real belief, and she knew that real belief was impossible for her. She could never say, with joyous fervour: "I believe!" At best she could only assert that she did not disbelieve—and was she so sure even of that? No! Belief had been denied to her; and to dream of consolation from religion was sentimentally womanish; even in her indifference she preferred straightforward, honest damnation to the soft self-deceptions of feminine religiosity. Ah! If she could have been a Roman Catholic, genuine and convinced—with what ardour would she have cast herself down before the confessional, and whispered her sinfulness to the mysterious face within; and with what ecstasy would she have received the absolution—that cleansing bath of the soul! Then—she could have recommenced! . . . But she was not a Roman Catholic. She could no more become a Roman Catholic than she could become the queen of some romantic Latin country of palaces and cathedrals. She was a young provincial girl staying in a boarding-house at Hornsey, on the Great Northern line out of London, and she was suffering from nervous breakdown. Such was the exterior common sense of the situation.

Occasionally the memory of some verse of Victor Hugo, sounding the beat of one of his vast melancholies, would float through her mind and cause it to vibrate for an instant with a mournful sensation that resembled pleasure.

#### IV

"Are you thinking of getting up, dear?" asked Sarah Gailey, as she arranged more securely the contents of the tray and found space on it for her weekly books.

"Yes, I suppose I may as well," Hilda murmured. "It'll be lunch-time soon." The days were long, yet somehow they

seemed short too. Already, before getting up, she would begin to think of the evening and of going to bed; and Saturday night followed quickly on Monday morning. It was scarcely credible that sixteen weeks had passed, thus, since her mother's death—sixteen weeks whose retrospect showed no achievement of any kind, and hardly a desire.

"I've given those Boutwoods notice," said Sarah Gailey suddenly, the tray in her hands ready to lift.

"Not really?"

"They were shockingly late for breakfast again, this morning, both of them. And Mr. Boutwood had the face to ask for another egg. Hettie came and told me, so I went in myself. I told him breakfast was served in my house at nine o'clock, and there was a notice to that effect in the bedrooms, not to mention the dining-room. And as good a breakfast as they'd get in any of their hotels, I lay! If the eggs are cold at ten o'clock and after, that's not my fault. They're both of them perfectly healthy, and yet they're bone-idle. They never want to go to bed and they never want to get up. It isn't as if they went to theatres and got home late and so on. I could make excuses for that—now and then. No! It's just idleness and carelessness. And if you saw their bedroom! Oh, my! A nice example to servants! Well, he was very insulting—most insulting. He said he paid me to give him not what I wanted, but what *he* wanted! He said if I went into a shop, and they began to tell me what I ought to want and when I ought to want it, I should be annoyed. I said I didn't need anyone to tell me that, I said! And my house wasn't a shop. He said it was a shop, and if it wasn't, it ought to be! Can you imagine it?"

Hilda tried to exhibit a tepid sympathy. Miss Gailey's nostrils were twitching, and the tears stood in those watery eyes. She could manage the house. By the exertion of all her powers and her force she had made of herself an exceptionally efficient mistress. But she could not *manage* the boarders, because she had not sufficient imagination to put herself in their place. Presiding over all her secret thoughts was the axiom that the Cedars was a perfect machine, and that the least that a grateful boarder could do was to fit into the machine.



"And so you said they could go?"

"That I did! And I'll tell you another thing, my dear, I——"

There was a knock at the door. Sarah Gailey stopped in her confidences like a caught conspirator, and opened the door. Hettie stood on the mat—the Hettie who, despite frequent protests, would leave Hilda's toast to cool into leather on the landing somewhere between the kitchen and the bedroom. In Hettie's hand was a telegram, which Miss Gailey accepted.

"Here, take the tray, Hettie," said she, nervously tearing at the envelope. "Put these books in my desk," she added.

"And I wonder what *he'll* say!" she observed, staring absently at the opened telegram after Hettie had gone.

"Who?"

"George. He says he'll be up here for lunch. He's bound to be vexed about the Boutwoods. But he doesn't understand. Men don't, you know! They don't understand the strain it is on you." The appeal of her eyes was strangely pathetic.

Hilda said:

"I don't think I shall get up for lunch to-day."

Sarah Gailey moved to the bed, forgetting her own trouble.

"You aren't so well, then, after all!" she muttered, with mournful commiseration. "But, you know, he'll have to see you *this* time. He wants to."

"But why?"

"Your affairs, I suppose. He says so. 'Coming lunch one. Must see Hilda.—George.'"

Sarah Gailey offered the telegram. But Hilda could not bear to take it. This telegram was the first she had set eyes on since the telegram handed to her by Florrie in George Cannon's office. The mere sight of the salmon-tinted paper agitated her. "Is it possible that I can be so silly," she thought, "over a bit of paper?" But so it was.

On a previous visit of George Cannon's to Hornsey she had kept her bed throughout the day, afraid to meet him, ashamed to meet him, inexplicably convinced that to meet him would be a crime against filial piety. There were obscure grottoes

in her soul which she had not had the courage to explore candidly.

"I think," said Sarah Gailey, reflective and anxious, "I think if you *could* get up, it would be nicer than him seeing you here in bed."

Hilda perceived that at last she would be compelled to face George Cannon.

## CHAPTER II

### THE LITTLE ROOM

#### I

**A**FTER lunch Sarah Gailey left Hilda and Mr. Cannon in 'the little room' together. 'The little room'—about eight feet square—had no other name; it was always spoken of affectionately by the boarders, and by the landlady with pride in its cosiness. Situated on the first floor, over the front part of the hall, it lay between the two principal bedrooms. Old boarders would discover the little room to new boarders, or new boarders would discover it for themselves, with immense satisfaction. It was the chamber of intimacy and of confidences; it was a refuge from the public life of the Cedars, and, to a certain extent, from the piano. Two women, newly acquainted, and feeling a mutual attraction, would say to each other: "Shall we go up to the little room?" "Oh yes, do let us!" And they would climb the stairs in a fever of anticipation. "Quite the most charming room in the house, dear Miss Gailey!" another simpering spinster would say. Yet it contained nothing but an old carpet, two wicker arm-chairs, a small chair, a nearly empty dwarf book-case, an engraving of Marie Antoinette regally facing the revolutionary mob, and a couple of photographs of the Cedars.

Hilda sat down in one of the arm-chairs, and George Cannon in the other; he had a small black bag which he placed on the floor by his side. Hilda's diffidence was extreme. Throughout lunch she had scarcely spoken; but as there had been eight people at the table, and George Cannon had chatted with all of them, her taciturnity had passed inconspicuous. Now she would be obliged to talk. And the sensations which she had experienced on first meeting George

Cannon in the dining-room were renewed in a form even more acute.

She had, in the first place, the self-consciousness due to her mourning attire, which drew attention to herself; it might have been a compromising uniform; and the mere fact of her mother's death—quite apart from the question of her conduct in relation thereto—gave her, in an interview with a person whom she had not seen since before the death, a feeling akin to guiltiness—guiltiness of some misdemeanour of taste, some infraction of the social law against notoriety. She felt, in her mourning, like one who is being led publicly by policemen to the police-station. In her fancy she could hear people saying: "Look at that girl in deep mourning," and she could see herself blushing, as it were apologetic.

But much worse than this general mortification in presence of an acquaintance seen after a long interval was the special constraint due to the identity of the acquaintance. It was with George Cannon that she had first deceived and plotted against her ingenuous mother's hasty plans. It was her loyalty to George Cannon that had been the cause of her inexplicable disloyalty to her mother. She could not recall her peculiar and delicious agitations during the final moments of her previous interview with Cannon—that night of February in the newspaper office, while her mother was dying in London—without a profound unreasoning shame which intensified most painfully her natural grief as an orphan.

There was this to be said: she was now disturbed out of her torpid indifference to her environment. As she fidgeted there, pale and frowning, in the noisy basket-chair, beneath George Cannon's eyes, she actually perceived again that romantic quality of existence which had always so powerfully presented itself to her in the past. She reflected: "How strange that the dreaded scene has now actually begun! He has come to London, and here we are together, in this house, which at the beginning of the year was nothing but a name to me! And mother is away there in the churchyard, and I am in black! And it is all due to him. He sent Miss Gailey and mother to London. He willed it! . . . No! It is all due to me! I went to see him one late afternoon. I sought him out. He didn't seek me out. And just because

I went to see him one afternoon, mother is dead, and I am here! Strange!" These reflections were dimly beautiful to her, even in her sadness and in her acute distress. The coma had assuredly passed, if only for a space.

## II

"Well, now," he said, after a few inanities had been succeeded by an awkward pause. "I've got to talk business with you, so I suppose we may as well begin, eh?" His tone was fairly blithe, but it was that of a man who was throwing off with powerful ease the weariness of somewhat exasperating annoyances. Since lunch he had had a brief interview with Sarah Gailey.

"Yes," she agreed glumly.

"Have you decided what you're going to do?" He began to smile sympathetically as he spoke.

"I'm not going back to the paper," she curtly answered, cutting short the smile with fierceness, almost with ferocity. Beyond question she was rude in her bitterness. She asked herself: "Why do I talk like this? Why can't I talk naturally and gently and cheerfully? I've really got nothing against him." But she could not talk otherwise than she did talk. It was by this symptom of biting acrimony that her agitation showed itself. She knew that she was scowling as she looked at the opposite wall, but she could not smooth away the scowl.

"No, I suppose not," he said quietly. "But are you thinking of coming back to Turnhill?"

She remained mute for some seconds. A feeling of desolation came over her, and it seemed to her that she welcomed it, trying to intensify it, and yielding her features to it. "How do I know?" she muttered at length, shrugging her shoulders.

"Because if you aren't," he resumed, "it's no use you keeping that house of yours empty. You must remember it's just as you left it; and the things in it aren't taking any good, either."

She shrugged her shoulders again.

"I don't see that it matters to anybody but me," she said, after another pause, with a sort of frigid and disdainful



nonchalance. And once more she reflected: "Is it possible that I can behave so odiously?"

He stood up suddenly.

"I don't know what you and Sarah have been plotting together," he said, wounded and contemptuous, yet with lightness. "But I'm sure I don't want to interfere in your affairs. With Sarah's I've got to interfere, unfortunately, and a famous time I'm having!" His nostrils grew fastidious. "But not yours! I only promised your uncle. . . . Your uncle told me you wanted me to——" He broke off.

In an instant she grew confused, alarmed, and extremely ashamed. Her mood had changed in a flash. It seemed to her that she was in presence of a disgraceful disaster, which she herself had brought about by wicked and irresponsible temerity. She was like a child who, having naughtily trifled with danger, stands aghast at the calamity which his perverseness has caused. She was positively affrighted. She reflected in her terror: "I asked for this, and I've got it!"

George Cannon stooped and picked up his little bag. There he towered, high and massive, above her! And she felt acutely her slowness, her girlishness, and her need of his help. She could not afford to transform sympathy into antipathy. She was alone in the world. Never before had she realized, as she realized then, the lurking terror of her loneliness. The moment was critical. In another moment he might be gone from the room, and she left solitary to irremediable humiliation and self-disgust.

"Please!" she whispered appealingly. The whole of her being became an appeal—the glance, the gesture, the curve of the slim and fragile body. She was like a slave. She had no pride, no secret reserve of thought. She was an instinct. Tears showed in her eyes and affected her voice.

He gave the twisted, difficult, rather foolish smile of one who is cursing the mortification of a predicament into which he has been cast through no fault of his own.

"Please what?"

"Please sit down."

He waved a hand, deprecatingly, and obeyed.

"It's all right," he said. "All right! I ought to have known——" Then he smiled generously.

"Known what?" Her voice was now weak and liquid with woe.

"You'd be likely to be upset."

Not furtively, but openly, she wiped her eyes.

"No, no!" she protested honestly. "It's not that. It's—but—I'm very sorry."

"I reckon I know a bit what worry is, myself!" he added, with a brief, almost harsh laugh.

These strange words struck her with pity.

### III

"Well, now,"—he seemed to be beginning again—"let's leave Lessways Street for a minute. . . . I can sell the Calder Street property for you, if you like. And at a pretty good price. Sooner or later the town will have to buy up all that side of the street. You remember I told your mother last year but one I could get a customer for it? but she wasn't having any."

"Yes," said Hilda eagerly; "I remember."

In her heart she apologized to George Cannon, once more, for having allowed her mother to persuade her, even for a day, that that attempt to buy was merely a trick on his part invented to open negotiations for the rent-collecting.

"You know what the net rents are," he went on, "as you've had 'em every month. I dare say the purchase money if it's carefully invested will bring you in as much. But even if it doesn't bring in quite as much, you mustn't forget that Calder Street's going down—it's getting more and more of a slum. And there'll always be a lot of bother with tenants of that class."

"I wish I could sell everything—everything!" she exclaimed passionately. "Lessways Street as well! Then I should be absolutely free!"

"You can!" he said, with dramatic emphasis. "And let me tell you that ten years hence those Lessways Street houses won't be worth what they are now!"

"Is that property going down, too?" she asked. "I thought they were building all round there."

"So they are," he answered. "But cheap cottages. Your houses are too good for that part of the town; that's what's

the matter with them. People who can afford £25 a year—and over—for rent won't care to live there much longer. You know the end house is empty."

All houses seemed to her to be a singularly insecure and even perilous form of property. And the sale of everything she possessed presented itself to her fancy as a transaction which would enfranchise her from the past. It symbolized the starting-point of a new life, of a recommencement unhampered by the vestiges of grief and error. She could go anywhere, do what she chose. The entire world would lie before her.

"Please do sell it all for me!" she pleaded wistfully. "Supposing you could, about how much should I have—I mean income?"

He glanced about, and then, taking a pencil from his waistcoat pocket, scribbled a few figures on his cuff.

"Quite three pounds a week," he said.

#### IV

After a perfunctory discussion, which was somewhat self-consciously prolonged by both of them in order to avoid an appearance of hastiness in an important decision, George Cannon opened his black bag and then looked round for ink. The little room, having no table, had no inkpot, and the lawyer took from his pocket an Eagle indelible pencil—the fountain-pen of those simple days. It needed some adjustment; he stepped closer to the window, and held the pointed end of the case up to the light, while screwing the lower end; he was very fastidious in these mechanical details of his vocation. Hilda watched him from behind, with an intentness that fascinated herself.

"And how's the 'Chronicle' getting on?" she asked, in a tone of friendly curiosity which gave an exaggerated impression of her actual feeling. She was more and more ashamed that during lunch she had not troubled to put a question about the paper. She was even ashamed of her social indifference. That Sarah Gailey, narrow and pre-occupied, should be indifferent, should never once in three months have referred to her brother's organ, was not surprising; but it was monstrous that she, Hilda, the secretary, the

priestess, should share this uncivil apathy ; and it was unjust to mark the newspaper, as somehow she had been doing, with the stigma of her mother's death. She actually began to characterize her recent mental attitude to her past life as morbid.

"Oh!" he murmured absently, with gloomy hesitation, as he manipulated the pencil.

She went on still more persuasively :

"I suppose you've got a new secretary?"

"No," he said, as though it fatigued and annoyed him to dwell on the subject. "I told 'em they must manage without. . . . It's no fun starting a new paper in a God-forsaken hole like the Five Towns, I can tell you."

Plainly his high exuberant hopes had been dashed, had perhaps been destroyed.

She did not reply. She could not. She became suddenly sad with sympathy, and this sadness was beautiful to her. Already, when he was scribbling on it, she had noticed that his wristband was frayed. Now, silhouetted against the window, the edge of the wristband caught her attention again, and grew strangely significant. This man was passing through adversity! It seemed tragic and shocking to her that he should have to pass through adversity, that he could not remain for ever triumphant, brilliant, cocksure in all his grand schemes, and masculinely scathless. It seemed wrong to her that he should suffer, and desirable that anybody should suffer rather than he. George Cannon with faulty linen! By what error of destiny had this heart-rending phenomenon of discord been caused? (Yes, heart-rending!) Was it due to weary carelessness, or to actual, horrible financial straits? Either explanation was very painful to her. She had a vision of a whole sisterhood of women toiling amid steam and soapsuds in secret, and in secret denying themselves, to provide him with all that he lacked so that he might always emerge into the world unblemished and glitteringly perfect. She would have sacrificed the happiness of multitudes to her sense of fitness.

There being no table, George Cannon removed a grotesque ornament from the dwarf bookcase, and used the top of the

bookcase as a writing-board. Hilda was called upon to sign two papers. He explained exactly what these papers were, but she did not understand, nor did she desire to understand. One was an informal sale-note and the other was an authority; but which was which, and to what each had reference, she superbly and wilfully ignored. She could, by a religious effort of volition, make of herself an excellent clerk, eagerly imitative and mechanical, but she had an instinctive antipathy to the higher forms of business. Moreover, she wanted to trust herself to him, if only as a mystic reparation of her odious rudeness at the beginning of the interview. And she thought also: "These transactions will result in profit to him. It is by such transactions that he lives. I am helping him in his adversity."

When he gave her the Eagle pencil, and pointed to the places where she was to sign, she took the pencil with fervour, more and more anxious to atone to him. For a moment she stood bewildered, in a dream, staring at the scratched mahogany top of the bookcase. And the bookcase seemed to her to be something sentient, patient, and helpful, that had always been waiting there in the corner to aid George Cannon in this crisis—something human like herself. She loved the bookcase, and the Eagle pencil, and the papers, and the pattern on the wall. George Cannon was standing behind her. She felt his presence like a delicious danger. She signed the papers, in that large scrawling hand which for a few brief weeks she had by force cramped down to the submissive caligraphy of a clerk. As she signed, she saw the name "Karkeek" in the midst of one of the documents, and remembered, with joyous nonchalance, that George Cannon's own name never appeared in George Cannon's affairs.

He took her place in front of the little bookcase, and folded the documents. There he was, beside her, in all his masculinity—his moustache, his blue chin, his wide white hands, his broadcloth—there he was planted on his massive feet as on a pedestal! She did not see him; she was aware of him. And she was aware of the closed door behind them. One of the basket-chairs, though empty, continued to creak, like a thing alive. Faintly, very faintly, she could hear the piano—



Mrs. Boutwood playing ! Overhead were the footsteps of Sarah Gailey and Hettie—they were checking the linen from the laundry, as usual on Saturday afternoon. And she was aware of herself, thin, throbbing, fragile, mournful, somehow insignificant !

He looked round at her, with a half-turn of the head. In his glance was good humour, good nature, protectiveness, and rectitude ; and, more than these, some of the old serenely smiling triumphant quality. He was not ruined ! He was not really in adversity ! He remained the conqueror ! She thrilled with her relief.

“ You’re in my hands now—no mistake ! ” he murmured roguishly, picking up the documents, and bending over the bag.

Hilda could hear a heavy footstep on the stairs, ascending.

In the same instant she had an extraordinary and disconcerting impulse to seize his hand—she knew not why, whether it was to thank him, to express her sympathy, or to express her submission. She struggled against this impulse, but the impulse was part of herself and of her inmost self. She was afraid, but her fear was pleasurable. She was ashamed, but her shame was pleasurable. She wanted to move away from where she stood. She thought : “ If only I willed to move away, I could move away. But, no ! I shall not will it. I like remaining just here, in this fear, this shame, and this agitation.” She had a clear, dazzling perception of the splendour and the fineness of sin ; but she did not know what sin ! And all the time the muscles of her arm were tense in the combat between the weakening desire to keep her arms still and the growing desire to let her hand seize the hand of George Cannon. And all the time the heavy footstep was ascending the interminable staircase. And all the time George Cannon, with averted head, was fumbling in the bag. And then, in a flash, she was really afraid ; the fear was no longer pleasurable, and her shame had become a curse. She said to herself : “ I cannot move now. In a minute I shall do this horrible thing. Nothing can save me.” Despairing, she found a dark and tumultuous joy in despair. The trance endured for ages, while disaster approached nearer and nearer.

Then, after the heavy footstep had been climbing the staircase since earth began, the door was brusquely opened, and the jovial fat face of Mr. Boutwood appeared, letting in the louder sound of the piano.

"Oh, I beg pardon!" he muttered, pretending that he had assumed the little room to be empty. The fact was that he was in search of George Cannon, in whom he had recognized a fraternal spirit.

"Come in, Mr. Boutwood," said Hilda, with an easy, disdainful calm which absolutely astounded herself. "That's all, then?" she added, to George Cannon, glancing at him indifferently. She departed without waiting for an answer.

## VI

Putting on a bonnet, and taking an umbrella to occupy her hands, she went out into the remedial freedom of the streets. And after turning the first corner she saw coming towards her the figure of a woman whom she seemed to know, elegant, even stately, in youthful grace. It was Janet Orgreave, wearing a fashionable fawn-coloured summer costume. As they recognized each other the girls blushed slightly. Janet hastened forward. Hilda stood still. She was amazed at the chance which had sent her two unexpected visitors in the same day. They shook hands and kissed.

"So I've found you!" said Janet. "How are you, you poor dear? Why didn't you answer my letter?"

"Letter?" Hilda repeated, wondering. Then she remembered that she had indeed received a letter from Janet, but in her comatose dejection had neglected to answer it.

"I'm up in London with father for the week-end. We want you to come with us to the Abbey to-morrow. And you must come back with us to Bursley on Monday. You *must*! We're quite set on it. I've left father all alone this afternoon, to come up here and find you out. Not that he minds! What a way it is! But how are you, Hilda?"

Hilda was so touched by Janet's affectionate solicitude that her eyes filled with tears. She looked at that radiating and innocent goodness, and thought: "How different I am from her! She hasn't the least idea how different I am!"

For a moment, Janet seemed to her to be a sort of angel

—modish, but exquisitely genuine. She saw in the invitation to the Five Towns a miraculous defence against a peril the prospect of which was already alarming her. She would be compelled to go to Turnhill in order to visit Lessways Street and decide what of her mother's goods she must keep. She would of course take Janet with her. In all the Turnhill affairs Janet should accompany her. Her new life should begin under the protection of Janet's society. And her heart turned from the old life towards the new with hope and a vague brightening expectation of happiness.

At the Cedars, she led Janet to her bedroom, and then came out of the bedroom to bid good-bye to George Cannon. The extreme complexity of existence and of her sensations baffled and intimidated her.

## CHAPTER III

### JOURNEY TO BLEAKRIDGE

#### I

**H**ILDA and Janet were mounting the precipitous Sytch Bank together on their way from Turnhill into Bursley. It was dark; they had missed one train at Turnhill and had preferred not to wait for the next. Although they had been very busy in Hilda's house throughout all the afternoon and a part of the evening, and had eaten only a picnic meal, neither of them was aware of fatigue, and the two miles to Bursley seemed a trifle.

Going slowly up the steep slope, they did not converse. Janet said that the weather was changing, and Hilda, without replying, peered at the black, baffling sky. The air had, almost suddenly, grown warmer. Above, in the regions unseen, mysterious activities were in movement, as if marshalling vast forces. The stars had vanished. A gentle but equivocal wind on the cheek presaged rain, and seemed to be bearing downwards into the homeliness of the earth some strange vibration out of infinite space. The primeval elements of the summer night encouraged and intensified Hilda's mood, half joyous, half apprehensive. She thought: "A few days ago, I was in Hornsey, with the prospect of the visit to Turnhill before me. Now the visit is behind me. I said that Janet should be my companion, and she has been my companion. I said that I would cut myself free, and I have cut myself free. I need never go to Turnhill again, unless I like. The two trunks will be sent for to-morrow; and all the rest will be sold—even the clock. The thing is done. I have absolute liberty, and an income, and the intimacy of this splendid affectionate Janet. . . . How fortunate it was that Mr. Cannon was not at his office when we called! Of course I was obliged to call. . . . And yet would

it not be more satisfactory if I had seen him? . . . I must have been in a horribly morbid state up at Hornsey. . . . Soon I must decide about my future. Soon I shall actually have decided! . . . Life is very queer!" She had as yet no notion whatever of what she would do with her liberty and her income and the future; but she thought vaguely of something heroic, grandiose, and unusual.

## II

In her hand she carried a small shabby book, bound in blue and gold, with gilt edges a little irregular. She had found this book while sorting out the multitudinous contents of her mother's wardrobe, and at the last moment, perceiving that it had been overlooked, and being somehow ashamed to leave it to the auctioneers, she had brought it away, not knowing how she would ultimately dispose of it. The book had possibly been dear to her mother, but she could not embarrass her freedom by conserving everything that had possibly been dear to her mother. It was entitled "The Girl's Week-day Book," by Mrs. Copley, and it had been published by the Religious Tract Society, no doubt in her mother's girlhood. The frontispiece, a steel engraving, showed a group of girls feeding some swans by the terraced margin of an ornamental water, and it bore the legend, "Feeding the Swans." And on the title page was the text: "That our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace. Psalm cxliv. 12." In the table of contents were such phrases as: "One thing at a time. Darkness and Light. Respect for Ministers. The Drowning Fly. Trifling with words of Scripture. Goose and Swan. Delicate Health. Conscientious Regard to Truth. Sensibility and Gentleness contrasted with Affectation. Curiosity and Tattling. Instability of Worldly Possessions." A book representing, for Hilda, all that was most grotesque in an age that was now definitely finished and closed! A silly book!

During the picnic meal she had idly read extracts from it to Janet, amusing sentences; and though the book had once been held sacred by her who was dead, and though they were engaged in stirring the scarce-cold ashes of a tragedy, the girls had nevertheless permitted themselves a kindly, moderate



mirth. Hilda had quoted from a conversation in it : " Well, I would rather sit quietly round this cheerful fire, and talk with dear mamma, than go to the grandest ball that ever was known ! " and Janet had plumply commented : " What a dreadful lie ! " And then they had both laughed openly, perhaps to relieve the spiritual tension caused by the day's task and the surroundings. After that, Hilda had continued to dip into the book, but silently. And Janet had imagined that Hilda was merely bored by the monotonous absurdity of the sentiments expressed.

Janet was wrong. Hilda had read the following : " One word more. Do not rest in your religious impressions. You have, perhaps, been the subject of terror on account of sin ; your mind has been solemnized by some event in Providence ; by an alarming fit of sickness, or the death of a relative or a companion. . . . This is indeed to be reckoned a great mercy ; but then the danger is, lest you should rest here ; lest those tears, and terrors, and resolutions, should be the only evidences on which you venture to conclude on the safety of your immortal state. What is your present condition ? . . . "

Which words intimidated Hilda in spite of herself. In vain she repeated that the book was a silly book. She really believed that it was silly, but she knew also that there was an aspect of it which was not silly. She was reminded by it that she had found no solution of the problem which had distracted her in Hornsey. ' What is your present condition ? ' Her present condition was still that of a weakling and a coward who had sunk down inertly before the great problem of sin. And now, in the growing strength of her moral convalescence, she was raising her eyes again to meet the problem. Her future seemed to be bound up with the problem. As she breasted the top of the Sytch under the invisible lowering clouds, with her new, adored friend by her side, and the despised but powerful book in her hand, she mused in an ambiguous reverie upon her situation, dogged by the problem which alone was accompanying her out of the past into the future. Her reverie was shot through by piercing needles of regret for her mother ; and even with the touch of Janet's arm against her own in the darkness she had sharp realiza-

tions of her extreme solitude in the world. Withal, the sense of life was precious and beautiful. She was not happy ; but she was filled with the mysterious vital elation which surpasses happiness.

## III

They descended gently into Bursley, crossing the top of St. Luke's Square and turning eastwards into Market Square, ruled by the sombre and massive Town Hall in whose high tower an illuminated dial shone like a topaz. To Hilda, this nocturnal entry into Bursley had the romance of an entry into a town friendly but strange and recondite. During the few days of her stay with the Orgreaves in the suburb of Bleakridge, she had scarcely gone into the town once. She had never seen it at night. In the old Turnhill days she had come over to Bursley occasionally with her mother ; but to shoppers from Turnhill, Bursley meant St. Luke's Square and not a yard beyond.

Now the girls arrived at the commencement of the steam-car track, where a huge engine and tram were waiting, and as they turned another corner, the long perspective of Trafalgar Road, rising with its double row of lamps towards fashionable Bleakridge, was revealed to Hilda. She thought, naturally, that every other part of the Five Towns was more impressive and more important than the poor little outskirt, Turnhill, of her birth. In Turnhill there was no thoroughfare to compare with Trafalgar Road, and no fashionable suburb whatever. She had almost the feeling of being in a metropolis, if a local metropolis.

" It's beginning to rain, I think," said Janet.

" Who's that ? " Hilda questioned abruptly, ignoring the remark in the swift, unreflecting excitement of a sensibility surprised.

" Where ? "

" There ! "

They were going down Duck Bank into the hollow. On the right, opposite the lighted Dragon Hotel, lay Duck Square in obscure somnolence ; at the corner of Duck Square and Trafalgar Road was a double-fronted shop, of which all the shutters were up except two or three in the centre of the

doorway. Framed thus in the aperture, a young man stood within the shop under a bright central gas-jet ; he was gazing intently at a large sheet of paper which he held in his outstretched hands, and the girls saw him in profile : tall, rather lanky, fair, with hair dishevelled, and a serious, studious, and magnanimous face ; quite unconscious that he made a picture for unseen observers.

" That ? " said Janet, in a confidential and interested tone. " That's young Clayhanger—Edwin Clayhanger.<sup>1</sup> His father's the printer, you know. Came from Turnhill, originally."

" I never knew," said Hilda. " But I seem to have heard the name."

" Oh ! It must have been a long time ago. He's got the best business in Bursley now. Father says it's one of the best in the Five Towns. He's built that new house just close to ours. Don't you remember I pointed it out to you ? Father's the architect. They're going to move into it next week or the week after. I expect that's why the son and heir's working so late to-night, packing and so on, perhaps."

The young man moved out of sight. But his face had made in those few thrilling seconds a deep impression on Hilda ; so that in her mind she still saw it, with an almost physical particularity of detail. It presented itself to her, in some mysterious way, as a romantic visage, wistful, full of sad subtleties, of the unknown and the seductive, and of a latent benevolence. It was as recondite and as sympathetic as the town in which she had discovered it.

She said nothing.

" Old Mr. Clayhanger is a regular character," Janet eagerly went on, to Hilda's great content. " Some people don't like him. But I rather do like him." She was always thus kind. " Grandmother once told me he sprang from simply nothing at all—worked on a potbank when he was quite a child."

" Who ? The father, you mean ? "

" Yes, the father. Now goodness knows how much he

<sup>1</sup> See first section, " Clayhanger."

isn't worth! Father is always saying he could buy *us* up, lock, stock, and barrel." Janet laughed. "People often call him a miser, but he can't be so much of a miser, seeing that he's built this new house."

"And I suppose the son's in the business?"

"Yes. He wanted to be an architect. That was how father got to know him. But old Mr. Clayhanger wouldn't have it. And so he's a printer, and one day he'll be one of the principal men in the town."

"Oh! So you know him?"

"Well, we do and we don't. I go into the shop sometimes; and then I've seen him once or twice up at the new house. We've asked him to come in and see us. But he's never come, and I don't think he ever will. I believe his father *does* keep him grinding away rather hard. I'm sure he's frightfully clever."

"How can you tell?"

"Oh! From bits of things he says. And he's read everything, it seems! And once he saved a great heavy printing-machine from going through the floor of the printing-shop into the basement. If it hadn't been for him there'd have been a dreadful accident. Everybody was talking about that. He doesn't look it, does he?"

They were now passing the corner at which stood the shop. Hilda peered within the narrowing, unshuttered slit, but she could see no more of Edwin Clayhanger.

"No, he doesn't," she agreed while thinking nevertheless that he did look precisely that. "And so he lives all alone with his father. No mother?"

"No mother. But there are two sisters. The youngest is married, and just going to have a baby, poor thing! The other one keeps house. I believe she's a splendid girl, but neither of them is a bit like Edwin. Not a bit. He's——"

"What?"

"I don't know. Look here, miss! What about this rain? I vote we take the car up the hill."

## IV

The steam-car was rumbling after them down Duck Bank. It stopped, huge above them, and they climbed into it through an odour of warm grease that trailed from the engine. The conductor touched his hat to Janet, who smiled like a sister upon this fellow-being. Two middle-aged men were the only other occupants of the interior of the car ; both raised their hats to Janet. The girls sat down in opposite corners next to the door. Then, with a deafening continuous clatter of loose glass-panes and throbbing of its filthy floor, the vehicle started again, elephantine.

It was impossible to talk in that unique din. Hilda had no desire to talk. She watched Janet pay the fares as in a dream, without even offering her own penny, though as a rule she was touchily punctilious in sharing expenses with the sumptuous Janet. Without being in the least aware of it, and quite innocently, Janet had painted a picture of the young man, Edwin Clayhanger, which intensified a hundred-fold the strong romantic piquancy of Hilda's brief vision of him. In an instant Hilda saw her ideal future—that future which had loomed grandiose, indefinite, and strange—she saw it quite precise and simple as the wife of such a creature as Edwin Clayhanger. The change was astounding in its abruptness. She saw all the delightful and pure vistas of love with a man, subtle, baffling and benevolent, and above all superior ; with a man who would be respected by a whole town as a pillar of society, while bringing to his intimacy with herself an exotic and wistful quality which neither she nor anyone could possibly define. She asked : " What attracts me in him ? I don't know. *I like him.*" She who had never spoken to him ! She who never before had vividly seen herself as married to a man ! He was clever ; he was sincere ; he was kind ; he was trustworthy ; he would have wealth and importance and reputation. All this was good ; but all this would have been indifferent to her, had there not been an enigmatic and inscrutable and unprecedented something in his face, in his bearing, which challenged and inflamed her imagination.

It did not occur to her to think of Janet as in the future a married woman. But of herself she thought, with new



agitations: "I am innocent now! I am ignorant now! I am a girl now! But one day I shall be so no longer. One day I shall be a woman. One day I shall be in the power and possession of some man—if not this man, then some other. Everything happens; and this will happen!" And the hazardous strangeness of life enchanted her.

## CHAPTER IV

### WITH THE ORGREAVES

#### I

THE Orgreave family was holding its nightly session in the large drawing-room of Lane End House when Hilda and Janet arrived. The bow-windows stood generously open in three different places, and the heavy outer curtains as well as the lace inner ones were moving gently in the capricious breeze that came across the oval lawn. The multitudinous sound of rain on leaves entered also with the wind ; and a steam-car could be heard thundering down Trafalgar Road, from which the house was separated by only a few intervening minor roofs.

Mrs. Orgreave, the plump, faded image of goodness, with Janet's full red lips and Janet's kindly eyes, sat as usual, whether in winter or in summer, near the fire-place, surveying with placidity the theatre where the innumerable dramas of her motherhood had been enacted. Tom, her eldest, the thin, spectacled lawyer, had, as a boy of seven, rampaged on that identical Turkey hearthrug, when it was new, a quarter of a century earlier. He was now seated at the grand piano with the youngest child, Alicia, a gawky little treasure, always alternating between pertness and timidity, aged twelve. Jimmie and Johnnie, young bloods of nineteen and eighteen, were only present in their mother's heart, being in process of establishing, by practice, the right to go forth into the world of an evening and return when they chose without suffering too much from family curiosity. Two other children—Marian, eldest daughter and sole furnisher of grandchildren to the family, and Charlie, a young doctor—were permanently away in London. Osmond Orgreave, the elegant and faintly mocking father of the brood, a handsome grizzled man of between fifty and sixty, was walking to and fro between the

grand piano and the small upright piano in the farther half of the room.

"Well, my dear?" said Mrs. Orgreave to Hilda. "You aren't wet?" She drew Hilda towards her and stroked her shoulder, and then kissed her. The embrace was to convey the mother's sympathy with Hilda in the ordeal of the visit to Turnhill, and her satisfaction that the ordeal was now over. The ageing lady seemed to kiss her on behalf of the entire friendly family; all the others, appreciating the delicacy of the situation, refrained from the peril of clumsy speech.

"Oh no, mother!" Janet exclaimed reassuringly. "We came up by car. And I had my umbrella. And it only began to rain in earnest just as we got to the gate."

"Very thoughtful of it, I'm sure!" piped the pig-tailed Alicia from the piano. She could talk, in her pert moments, exactly like her brothers.

"Alicia darling," said Janet, coaxingly, as she sat on the sofa flanked by the hat, gloves, and jacket which she had just taken off, "will you run upstairs with these things, and take Hilda's too? I'm quite exhausted. Father will swoon if I leave them here. I suppose he's walking about because he's so proud of his new birthday slippers."

"But I'm just playing the symphony with Tom!" Alicia protested.

"I'll run up—I was just going to," said Hilda.

"You'll do no such thing!" Mrs. Orgreave announced sharply. "Alicia, I'm surprised at you! Here Janet and Hilda have been out since noon, and you——"

"And so on and so on," said Alicia, jumping up from the piano in obedience.

"We didn't wait supper," Mrs. Orgreave went on. "But I told Martha to leave——"

"Mother dearest," Janet stopped her. "Please don't mention food. We've stuffed ourselves, haven't we, Hilda? Anyone been?"

"Swetnam," said Alicia, as she left the room with her arms full.

"Mr. Swetnam," corrected Mrs. Orgreave.

"Which one? The Ineffable?"

"The Ineffable," replied Mr. Orgreave, who had wandered, smiling enigmatically, to the sofa. His legs, like the whole of his person, had a distinguished air; and he held up first one slippered foot and then the other to the silent, sham-ecstatic inspection of the girls. "He may look in again, later on. It's evidently Hilda he wants to see." This said, Mr. Orgreave lazily sank into an easy chair, opposite the sofa, and lighted a cigarette. He was one of the most industrious men in the Five Towns, and assuredly the most industrious architect; but into an idle hour he could pack more indolence than even Johnnie and Jimmie, alleged wastrels, could accomplish in a week.

"I say, Janet," Tom sang out from the piano, "you aren't really exhausted, are you?"

"I'm getting better."

"Well, let's dash through the scherzo before the infant comes back. She can't take it half fast enough."

"And do you think I can?" said Janet, rising. In theory, Janet was not a pianist, and she never played solos, nor accompanied songs; but in the actual practice of duet-playing her sympathetic presence of mind at difficult crises of the music caused her to be esteemed by Tom, the expert and enthusiast, as superior to all other performers in the family.

## II

Hilda listened with pleasure and with exaltation to the scherzo. Beyond a little part-singing at school she had no practical acquaintance with music; there had never been a piano at home. But she knew that this music was Beethoven's; and from the mere intonation of that name, as it was uttered in her presence in the house of the Orgreaves, she was aware of its greatness, and the religious faculty in her had enabled her at once to accept its supremacy as an article of genuine belief; so that, though she understood it not, she felt it, and was uplifted by it. Whenever she heard Beethoven—and she heard it often, because Tom, in the words of the family, had for the moment got Beethoven on the brain—her thoughts and her aspirations were ennobled.

She was singularly content with this existence amid the

intimacy of the Orgreaves. The largeness and prodigality and culture of the family life, so different from anything she had ever known, and in particular so different from the desolating atmosphere of the Cedars, soothed and flattered her in a manner subtly agreeable. At the same time she was but little irked by it, for the reason that her spirit was not one to be unduly affected by exterior social, intellectual, and physical conditions. Moreover, the Orgreaves, though obviously of a class superior to her own, had the facile and yet aristocratic unceremoniousness which, unconsciously, repudiates such distinctions until circumstances arise that compel their acknowledgment. To live among the Orgreaves was like living in a small private republic that throbbed with a hundred activities and interests. Each member of it was a centre of various energy. And from each, Hilda drew something that was precious : from Mrs. Orgreave, sheer love and calm wisdom ; from Janet, sheer love and the spectacle of elegance ; from little Alicia, candour and admiration ; from Tom, knowledge, artistic enthusiasm, and shy, curt sympathy ; from Johnnie and Jimmie, the homage of their proud and naïve mannishness : as for Mr. Orgreave, she admired him perhaps as much as she admired even Janet, and once when he and she had taken a walk together up to Toft End, she had thought him quite exquisite in his attitude to her, quizzical, worldly, and yet sensitively understanding and humane. And withal they never worried her by interferences and criticisms ; they never presumed on their hospitality, but left her as free as though her age had been twice what it was. Undoubtedly, in the ardour of her gratitude she idealized every one of them. The sole reproach which in secret she would formulate against them had reference to their quasi-cynical levity in conversation. They would never treat a serious topic seriously for more than a few minutes. Either one or another would yield to the temptation of clever facetiousness, and clever facetiousness would always carry off the honours in a discussion. This did not apply to Mrs. Orgreave, who was incapable of humour ; but it applied a little even to Janet.

The thought continually arising in Hilda's mind was : " Why do they care for me ? What can they see in me ? Why are they so good to me ? I was never good to them."



She did not guess that, at her very first visit to Lane End House, the force and mystery of her character had powerfully attracted these rather experienced amateurs of human nature. She was unaware that she had made her mark upon Janet and Charlie so far back as the days of the dancing-classes. And she under-estimated the appeal of her situation as an orphan and a solitary whose mother's death, in its swiftness, had amounted to a tragedy.

The scherzo was finished, and Alicia had not returned to the drawing-room. The two pianists sat hesitant.

"Where is that infant?" Tom demanded. "If I finish it all without her she'll be vexed."

"I can tell you where she ought to be," said Mrs. Orgreave placidly. "She ought to be in bed. No wonder she looks pale, stopping up till this time of night!"

Then there were unusual and startling movements behind the door, accompanied by giggling. And Alicia entered, followed by Charlie—Charlie, who was supposed at that precise instant to be in London!

"Hello, mater!" said the curly-headed Charlie, with a sublime affectation of calmness, as though he had slipped out of the next room. He produced an effect fully equal to his desires.

### III

In a little while, Charlie, on the sofa, was seated at a small table covered with viands and fruit; the white cloth spread on the table made a curiously charming patch amid the sombre colours of the drawing-room. He had protested that, having consumed much food *en route*, he was not hungry; but in vain. Mrs. Orgreave demolished such arguments by the power of her notorious theory, which admitted no exceptions, that any person coming off an express train must be in need of sustenance. The odd thing was that all the others discovered mysterious appetites and began to eat and drink with gusto, sitting, standing, or walking about, while Charlie, munching, related how he had miraculously got three days' leave from the hospital, and how he had impulsively 'cabbed it' to Euston, and how, having arrived at Knype, he had also 'cabbed it' from Knype to Bleakridge instead of waiting

for the loop-line train. The blot on his advent, in the eyes of Mrs. Orgreave, was that he had no fresh news of Marian and her children.

"You don't seem very surprised to find Hilda here," said Alicia.

"It's not my business to be surprised at anything, kid," Charlie retorted, smiling at Hilda, who sat beside him on the sofa. "Moreover, don't I get ten columns of news every three days? I know far more about this town than you do, I bet!"

Everybody laughed at Mrs. Orgreave, the great letter-writer and universal disseminator of information.

"Now, Alicia, you must go to bed," said Mrs. Orgreave. And Alicia regretted that she had been so indiscreet as to draw attention to herself.

"The kid can stay up if she will say her piece," said Charlie mockingly. He knew that he could play the autocrat, for that evening at any rate.

"What piece?" the child demanded, blushing and defiant.

"Her 'Abou Ben Adhem,'" said Charlie. "Do you think I don't know all about that too?"

"Oh, mother, you are a bore!" Alicia exclaimed, pouting. "Why did you tell him that? . . . Well, I'll say it if Hilda will recite something as well."

"Me!" murmured Hilda, staggered. "I never recite!"

"I've always understood you recite beautifully," said Mrs. Orgreave.

"You know you do, Hilda!" said Janet.

"Of course you do," said Charlie.

"You've never heard me, anyhow!" she replied to him obstinately. How could they have got it fixed into their heads that she was a reciter? This renown was most disconcerting.

"Now, Hilda!" Mr. Orgreave soothingly admonished her from the back of the sofa. She turned her head and looked up at him, smiling in her distress.

"Go ahead, then, kid! It's agreed," said Charlie.

And Alicia galloped through Leigh Hunt's moral poem, which she was preparing for an imminent speech-day, in an extraordinarily short space of time.

"But I can't remember anything. I haven't recited for years and years," Hilda pleaded, when the child burst out, "Now, Hilda!"

"*Stuff!*" Charlie pronounced.

"Some Tennyson?" Mrs. Orgreave suggested. "Don't you know any Tennyson? We must have something, now." And Alicia, exulting in the fact that she had paid the penalty imposed, cried that there could be no drawing back.

Hilda was lost. Mrs. Orgreave's tone, with all its softness, was a command. "Tennyson? I've forgotten 'Maud,'" she muttered.

"I'll prompt you," said Charlie. "Thomas!"

Everybody looked at Tom, expert in literature as well as in music; Tom, the collector, the owner of books and book-cases. Tom went to a bookcase and drew forth a green volume, familiar and sacred throughout all England.

"Oh dear!" Hilda moaned.

"Where do you mean to begin?" Charlie sternly inquired. "It just happens that I'm reading 'In Memoriam,' myself. I read ten stanzas a day."

Hilda bent over the book with him.

"But I must stand up," she said, with sudden fire. "I can't recite sitting down."

They all cried "Bravo!" and made a circle for her. And she stood up.

The utterance of the first lines was a martyrdom for her. But after that she surrendered herself frankly to the mood of the poem and forgot to suffer shame, speaking in a loud, clear, dramatic voice which she accompanied by glances and even by gestures. After about thirty lines she stopped, and, regaining her ordinary senses, perceived that the entire family was staring at her with an extreme intentness.

"I can't do any more," she murmured weakly, and dropped on to the sofa.

Everybody clapped very heartily.

"It's wonderful!" said Janet in a low tone.

"I should just say it was!" said Tom seriously, and Hilda was saturated with delicious joy.

"You ought to go on the stage; that's what you ought to do!" said Charlie.

For a fraction of a second, Hilda dreamt of the stage, and then Mrs. Orgreave said softly, like a mother :

" I'm quite sure Hilda would never dream of any such thing ! "

## IV

There was an irruption of Jimmie and Johnnie, and three of the Swetnam brothers, including him known as the Ineffable. Jimmie and Johnnie played the rôle of the absolutely imperturbable with a skill equal to Charlie's own ; and only a series of calm " How-do's ? " marked the greetings of these relatives. The Swetnams were more rollickingly demonstrative. Now that the drawing-room was quite thickly populated, Hilda, made nervous by Mr. Orgreave's jocular insinuation that she herself was the object of the Swetnams' call, took refuge, first with Janet, and then, as Janet was drawn into the general crowd, with Charlie, who was absently turning over the pages of " In Memoriam."

" Know this ? " he inquired, friendly, indicating the poem.

" I don't," she said. " It's splendid, isn't it ? "

" Well," he answered, " it's rather on the religious tack, you know. That's why I'm reading it." He smiled oddly.

" Really ? "

He hesitated, and then nodded. It was the strangest avowal from this young dandy of twenty-three with the airy and cynical tongue. Hilda thought : " Here, then, is another ! " And her own most secret troubles recurred to her mind.

" What's that about Teddy Clayhanger ? " Charlie cried out, suddenly looking up. He had caught the name in a distant conversation.

Janet explained how they had seen Edwin, and went on to say that it was impossible to persuade him to call.

" What rot ! " said Charlie. " I bet you what you like I get him here to-morrow night." He added to Hilda : " Went to school with him ! " Hilda's face burned.

" I bet you don't," said Janet stoutly, from across the room.

" I'll bet you a shilling I do," said Charlie.

" Haven't a penny left," Janet smiled. " Father, will you lend me a shilling ? "

" That's what I'm here for," said Mr. Orgreave.

" Mr. Orgreave," the youngest Swetnam put in, " you talk exactly like the dad talks."

The bet was made, and according to a singular but long-established family custom, Tom had to be stake-holder.

Hilda became troubled and apprehensive. She hoped that Charlie would lose, and then she hoped that he would win. Looking forward to the intimate bedroom chat with Janet which brought each evening to a heavenly close, she said to herself : " If he *does* come, I shall make Janet promise that I'm not to be asked to recite or anything. In fact, I shall get her to see that I'm not discussed."



## CHAPTER V

### EDWIN CLAYHANGER

#### I

THE next evening, Mr. and Mrs. Orgreave, Hilda, Janet, and Alicia were in the dining-room of the Orgreaves awaiting the advent at the supper-table of sundry young men whose voices could be heard through open doors in the distance of the drawing-room.

Charlie Orgreave had won his bet : and Edwin Clayhanger was among those young men who had remained behind in the drawing-room to exchange, according to the practice of young men, ideas upon life and the world. Hilda had been introduced to him, but owing to the performance of another Beethoven symphony there had been almost no conversation before supper, and she had not heard him talk. She had stationed herself behind the grand piano, on the plea of turning over the pages for the musicians (though it was only with great uncertainty, and in peril of missing the exact instant for turning, that she followed the music on the page), and from this security she had furtively glanced at Edwin when her task allowed. "Perhaps I was quite mistaken last night," she said to herself. "Perhaps he is perfectly ordinary." The strange thing was that she could not decide whether he was ordinary or not. At one moment his face presented no interest ; at another she saw it just as she had seen it, framed in the illuminated aperture of the shop-shutters, on the previous night. Or she fancied that she saw it thus. The more she tried to distinguish between Edwin's reality and her fancies concerning Edwin, the less she succeeded. She would pronounce positively that her fancies were absurd and even despicable. But this abrupt positiveness did not convince. Supposing that he was, after all, marvellous among men ! During the day she had taken advantage of the

mention of his name to ascertain discreetly some details of the legendary feat by which as a boy he had saved his father's printing-shop from destruction. The details were vague, and not very comprehensible, but they seemed to indicate on his part an astounding presence of mind, a heroic promptitude in action. Assuredly, the Orgreaves regarded him as a creature out of the common run. And at the same time they all had the air of feeling rather sorry for him.

Standing near the supper-table, Hilda listened intently for the sound of his voice among the other voices in the drawing-room. But she could not separate it from the rest. Perhaps he was keeping silence. She said to herself: "Yet what do I care whether he is keeping silence or not?"

Mr. Orgreave remarked, in the suspense, glancing ironically at his wife:

"I think I'll go upstairs and do an hour's planning. They aren't likely to be more than an hour, I expect?"

"Hilda," said Mrs. Orgreave, quite calm, but taking her husband quite seriously, "will you please go and tell those young men from me that supper is waiting."

## II

Of course Hilda obeyed, though it appeared strange to her that Mrs. Orgreave had not sent Alicia on such an errand. Passing out of the bright dining-room where the gas was lit, she hesitated a moment in the dark broad corridor that led to the drawing-room. The mission, she felt, would make her rather prominent in front of Edwin Clayhanger, the stranger, and she had an objection to being prominent in front of him; she had, indeed, taken every possible precaution against such a danger. "How silly I am to loiter here!" she thought. "I might be Alicia!"

The boys, she could now hear, were discussing French literature, and in particular Victor Hugo. When she caught the name of Victor Hugo she lifted her chin, and moved forward a little. She worshipped Victor Hugo with a passion unreflecting and intense, simply because certain detached lines from his poems were the most splendid occupants of her memory, dignifying every painful or sordid souvenir. At last Charlie's clear, gay voice said:

"It's all very well, and Victor Hugo *is* Victor Hugo ; but you can say what you like—there's a lot of this that'll bear skipping, your worships."

Already she was at the doorway. In the dusk of the unlighted chamber the faces of the four Orgreaves and Clayhanger showed like pale patches on the gloom.

"Not a line !" she said fiercely, with her extremely clear articulation. She had no right to make such a statement, for she had not read the twentieth part of Victor Hugo's work ; she did not even know what book they were discussing—Charlie held the volume lightly in his hand—but she was incensed against the mere levity of Charlie's tone.

She saw Edwin Clayhanger jump at the startling interruption. And all five looked round. She could feel her face burning.

Charlie quizzed her with a word, and then turned to Edwin Clayhanger for support. "Don't *you* think that some of it's dullish, Teddy ? "

Edwin Clayhanger, shamefaced, looked at Hilda wistfully, as if in apology, as if appealing to her clemency against her fierceness ; and said slowly :

"Well—yes."

He had agreed with Charlie ; but while disagreeing with Hilda he had mysteriously proved to her that she had been right in saying to herself on the previous evening : "*I like him.*"

The incident appeared to her to be enormous and dramatic. She moved away, as it were breathless under emotion, and then, remembering her errand, threw over her shoulder :

"Mrs. Orgreave wants to know when you're coming to supper."

### III

The supper-table was noisy and joyous—more than usually so on account of the presence of Charlie, the gayest member of the family. At either end of the long, white-spread board sat Mr. and Mrs. Orgreave ; Alicia stood by Mr. Orgreave, who accepted her caresses with the negligence of a handsome father. Along one side sat Hilda, next to Janet, and these two were flanked by Jimmie and Johnnie, tall, unbending,

apparently determined to prove by a politely supercilious demeanour that to pass a whole evening thus in the home circle was considered by them to be a concession on their part rather than a privilege. Edwin Clayhanger sat exactly opposite to Hilda, with Charlie for sponsor; and Tom's spectacles gleamed close by.

Hilda, while still constrained, was conscious of pleasure in the scene, and of a certain pride in forming part of it. These prodigal and splendid persons respected and liked her, even loved her. Her recitation on the previous evening had been a triumph. She was glad that she had shown them that she could at any rate do one thing rather well; but she was equally glad that she had obtained Janet's promise to avoid any discussion of her qualities or her situation. After all, with her self-conscious restraint and her pitiful assured income of three pounds a week, she was a poor little creature compared with the easy, luxurious beings of this household, whose upkeep could not cost less than three pounds a day. Janet, in rich and complicated white, and glistening with jewels at hand and neck, was a princess beside her. She hated her spare black frock, and for the second time in her life desired expensive clothes markedly feminine. She felt that she was at a grave disadvantage, and that to remedy this disadvantage would be necessary, not only dresses and precious stones, but an instinctive faculty of soft allurements which she had not. Each gesture of Janet's showed seductive grace, while her own rare gestures were stiffened by a kind of masculine harshness. Every time that the sad-eyed and modest Edwin Clayhanger glanced at Janet, and included herself in the glance, she fancied that he was unjustly but inevitably misprising herself. And at length she thought: "Why did I make Janet promise that I shouldn't be talked about? Why shouldn't he know all about my mourning, and that I'm the only girl in the Five Towns that can write shorthand? Why should I be afraid to recite again? However much I might have suffered through nervousness if I'd recited, I should have shown I'm not such a poor little thing as all that! Why am I such a baby?" She wilted under her own disdain.

It was strange to think that Edwin Clayhanger, scarcely

older than the irresponsible Charlie, was the heir to an important business, was potentially a rich and influential man. Had not Mr. Orgreave said that old Mr. Clayhanger could buy up all the Orgreaves if he chose? It was strange to think that this wistful and apparently timid young man, this nice boy, would one day be the head of a household, and of a table such as this! Yes, it would assuredly arrive! Everything happened. And the mother of that household? Would it be she? Her imagination leaped far into the future, as she exchanged a quiet, furtive smile with Mrs. Orgreave, and she tried to see herself as another Mrs. Orgreave, a strenuous and passionate past behind her, honoured, beloved, teased, adored. But she could not quite see herself thus. Impossible that she, with her temperament so feverish, restive, and peculiar, should ever reach such a haven! It was fantastically too much to expect! And yet, one day, if not with Edwin Clayhanger, then with another, with some mysterious being whom she had never seen! . . . Did not everything happen? . . . But then, equally, strange and terrible misfortunes might be lying in wait for her! . . . The indescribable sharp savour of life was in her nostrils.

## IV

The conversation had turned upon Bradlaugh, the shameless free-thinker, the man who had known how to make himself the centre of discussion in every house in England. This was the Bradlaugh year, the apogee of his notoriety. Dozens of times at the Cedars' meal-table had she heard the shocking name of Bradlaugh on outraged tongues, but never once had a word been uttered in his favour. The public opinion of the boarding-house was absolutely unanimous in reckoning him a scoundrel. In the dining-room of the Orgreaves the attitude towards him was different. His free-thought was not precisely defended, but champions of his right to sit in the House of Commons were numerous. Hilda grew excited, and even more self-conscious. It was as if she were in momentary expectation of being challenged by these hardy debaters: "Are not *you* a free-thinker?" Her interest was personal; the interest of one in peril. Compared with the discussions at the Cedars, this discussion was as the



open, tossing, windy sea to a weed-choked canal. The talk veered into mere profane politics, and Mr. Orgreave, entrenching himself behind an assumption of careless disdain, was severely attacked by all his sons except Jimmie, who, above Hilda's left shoulder, pretended to share the paternal scorn. The indifference of Hilda to politics was complete. She began to feel less disturbed; she began to dream. Then she suddenly heard, through her dream, the name of Bradlaugh again; and Edwin Clayhanger, in response to a direct question from Mr. Orgreave, was saying:

"You can't help what you believe. You can't make yourself believe anything. And I don't see why you should, either. There's no virtue in believing."

And Tom was crying "Hooray!"

Hilda was thunderstruck. She was blinded, as though by a mystic revelation. She wanted to exult, and to exult with all the ardour of her soul. This truth which Edwin Clayhanger had enunciated she had indeed always been vaguely aware of; but now in a flash she felt it, she faced it, she throbbed to its authenticity, and was free. It solved every difficulty, and loosed the load that for months past had wearied her back. "There's no virtue in believing." It was fundamental. It was the gift of life and of peace. Her soul shouted, as she realized that just there, in that instant, at that table, a new epoch had dawned for her. Never would she forget the instant and the scene—scene of her re-birth!

Mrs. Orgreave remonstrated with mild sadness:

"No virtue in believing! Eh, Mr. Edwin!"

And Hilda, under the ageing lady's grieved glance, tried to quench the exultation on her face, somewhat like a child trapped. But she could not. Tom again cried "Hooray!" His tone, however, grated on her sensibility. It lacked emotion. It was the tone of a pugilist's backer. And Janet permitted herself some pleasantry. And Charlie became frankly facetious. Was it conceivable that Charlie could be interested in religion? She liked him very much, partly because he and she had learnt to understand each other at the dancing-classes, and partly because his curly hair and his candid smile compelled sympathy. But her esteem for him had limits. It was astonishing that a family otherwise simply

perfect should be content with jocosity when jocosity was so obviously out of place. Were they, then, afraid of being serious? . . . Edwin Clayhanger was not laughing; he had blushed. Her eyes were fixed on him with the extremest intensity, studying him, careless of the danger that his gaze might catch hers. She was lost in him. And then, he caught her; and, burning with honest shame, she looked downwards.

## CHAPTER VI

### IN THE GARDEN

#### I

**T**HAT evening Janet did not stay long in Hilda's bedroom, having perceived that Hilda was in one of her dark, dreamy moods.

As soon as she was gone, Hilda lowered the gas a little, and then went to the window, and opened it wider, and, drawing aside the blind, looked forth. The night was obscure and warm; and a wet wind moved furtively about in the elm-trees of the garden. The window was at the side of the house; it gave on the west, and commanded the new house just finished by Mr. Orgreave for the Clayhanger family. The block of this generously planned dwelling rose massively at a distance of perhaps forty feet, dwarfing a whole row of cottages in the small street behind Lane End House; its various chimney-pots stood out a deeper black against the enigmatic sky. Beyond the Clayhanger garden-plot, as yet uncultivated, and its high boundary wall, ran the great silent thoroughfare, Trafalgar Road, whose gas-lamps reigned in the nocturnal silence that the last steam-car had left in its wake.

Hilda gazed at the house; and it seemed strange to her that the house, which but a short time ago had no existence whatever, and was yet cold and soulless, was destined to be the living home of a family, with history in its walls and memories clinging about it. The formidable magic of life was always thus discovering itself to her, so that she could not look upon even an untenanted, terra-cotta-faced villa without a secret thrill; and the impenetrable sky above was not more charmed and enchanted than those brick walls. When she reflected that one day the wistful, boyish Edwin Clayhanger would be the master of that house, that in that

house his will would be stronger than any other will, the mystery that hides beneath the surface of all things surged up and overwhelmed thought. And although scarcely a couple of hours had elapsed since the key of the new life had been put into her hands, she could not make an answer when she asked herself: "Am I happy or unhappy?"

## II

The sound of young men's voices came round the corner of the house from the lawn. Some of the brothers Orgreave were saying good night to Edwin Clayhanger in the porch. She knew that they had been chatting a long time in the hall, after Clayhanger had bidden adieu to the rest of the family. She wondered what they had been talking about, and what young men did in general talk about when they were by themselves and confidential. In her fancy she endowed their conversations with the inexplicable attractiveness of masculinity, as masculinity is understood by women alone. She had an intense desire to overhear such a conversation, and she felt that she would affront the unguessed perils of it with delight, drinking it up eagerly, every drop, even were the draught deadly. Meanwhile, the mere inarticulate sound of those distant voices pleased her, and she was glad that she was listening and that the boys knew it not.

Silence succeeded the banging of the front door. And then, after a pause, she was startled to hear the crunching of gravel almost under her window. In alarm she dropped the blind, but continued to peer between the edge of the blind and the window-frame. At one point the contiguous demesnes of the Orgreaves and the Clayhangers were separated only by a poor, sparse hedge, a few yards in length. Somebody was pushing his way through this hedge. It was Edwin Clayhanger. Despite the darkness of the night she could be sure that the dim figure was Edwin Clayhanger's by the peculiar, exaggerated swing of the loose arms. He passed the hedge, carelessly brushed his clothes with his hands, and walked slowly up the Clayhanger garden towards the new house, and in the deep shadow of the house was lost. Still, she could catch vague noises of movement. In a state of extreme

excitation she wondered what he could be doing. It seemed to her that he and she were sharing the night together.

## III

She thought :

"I would give anything to be able to speak to him privately and ask him a little more about what he said to-night. I ought to. I may never see him again. At any rate, I may never have another chance. He may have meant something else. He may not have been serious. . . ." The skin of her face prickled, and a physical wave of emotion seemed to sweep downwards through her whole body. The thrill was exquisite, but it was intimidating.

She whispered to herself :

"I could go downstairs and outside, and find him, and just ask him."

The next instant she was opening the door of her bedroom. . . . No, all the household had not yet retired, for a light was still burning in the corridor. Nevertheless she might go. She descended the stairs, asking herself aghast : "Why am I doing this ?" Another light was burning in the hall, and through the slit of the half-shut door of the breakfast-room she could see light. She stood hesitant. Then she heard the striking of a match in the breakfast-room, and she boldly pushed the door open. Tom, with a book before him, was lighting his pipe.

"Hello !" he said. "What's the matter ?"

"Oh, nothing !" she replied. "Only, I'm just going to walk about in the garden a minute. I shan't go to sleep unless I do." She spoke quite easily.

"All serene !" he agreed. "So long as you keep off the grass ! It's bound to be damp. I'll unchain the door for you, shall I ?"

She said that she could unfasten the door for herself, and he did not insist. The hospitality of the Orgreaves was never irksome. Tom had scarcely half-risen from his chair.

"I shan't be long," she added casually.

"That's all right, Hilda," he said. "I'm not going to bed just yet."

"All the others gone ?"



He nodded. She pulled the door to, tripped delicately through the hall, and unchained the heavy front door as quietly as she could.

## IV

She was outside, amid all the influences of the night. Gradually her eyes accustomed themselves again to the gloom. She passed along the façade of the house until she came to the corner, where the breeze surprised her, and whence she could discern the other house and, across the indistinct hedge, the other garden. Where was Edwin Clayhanger? Was he wandering in the other garden, or had he entered the house? Then a brief flare lit up a lower window of the dark mass for a few instants. He was within. She hesitated. Should she go forward, or should she go back? At length she went forward, and, finding in the hedge the gap which Clayhanger had made, forced her way through it. Her skirt was torn by an obstinate twig. Quite calmly she bent down and with her fingers examined the rent; it was not important. She was now in the garden of the Clayhangers, and he whom she sought was moving somewhere in the house. "Supposing I *do* meet him," she thought, "what shall I say to him?" She did not know what she should say to him, nor why she had entered upon this singular adventure. But the consciousness of self, the fine, disturbing sense of being alive in every vein and nerve, was a rich reward for her audacity. She wished that that tense moment of expectation might endure for ever.

She approached the house trembling. It was not by volition that she walked over the uneven clayey ground, but by instinct. She was in front of the garden-porch, and here she hesitated again, apparently waiting for a sign from the house. She glanced timidly about her, as though in fear of marauders that might spring out upon her from the shadow. Just over the boundary wall the placid flame of a gas-lamp peeped. Then, feeling with her feet for the steps, she ascended into the shelter of the porch. Almost at the same moment there was another flare behind the glass of the door; she heard the sound of unlatching; the flare expired. She was absolutely terror-struck now.

The door opened, grating on some dirt or gravel.

"Who's there?" demanded a queer, shaking voice.

She could see his form.

"Me!" she answered, in a harsh tone which was the expression of her dismay.

The deed was done, irretrievably. In her bedroom she had said that she would try to speak with him, and lo! they were face to face, in the dark, in secret! Her terror was now, at any rate, desperately calm. She had plunged; she was falling into the deep sea; she was hopelessly cut off from the past.

"Oh!" came the uncertain voice weakly. "Did you want me? Did anyone want me?"

She heard the door being closed behind him.

She told him, with peculiar curtness, how she had seen him from her window, and how she wished to ask him an important question.

"I dare say you think it's very queer of me," she added.

"Not at all," he said, with an insincerity that annoyed her.

"Yes, you do!" she sharply insisted. "But I want to know"—what did she want to know?"—"I want to know—did you mean it when you said—you know, at supper—that there's no virtue in believing?"

He stammered: "Did I say there was no virtue in believing?"

She cried out, irritated: "Of course you did! Do you mean to say you can say a thing like that and then forget about it? If it's true, it's one of the most wonderful things that were ever said. And that's why I wanted to know if you meant it, or whether you were only saying it because it sounded clever."

She stopped momentarily, wondering why she was thus implying an untruth; for the fact was that she had never doubted that he had been in earnest.

"That's what they're always doing in that house, you know—being clever!" she went on, in a tone apparently inimical to 'that house.'

"Yes," came the voice. "I meant it. Why?"

And the voice was so simple and so sincere that it pierced

straight to her heart and changed her secret mood swiftly to the religious, so that she really was occupied by the thoughts with which, a moment previously, she had only pretended to be occupied ; and the splendour of the revelation was renewed. Nevertheless, some impulse, perverse or defensive, compelled her to assume a doubt of his assurance. She suspected that, had she not adopted this tactic, she might have melted before him in gratitude.

" You did ? " she murmured.

She thanked him, after that, rather coldly,; and they talked a little about the mere worry of these religious questions, He protested that they never worried him, and reaffirmed his original proposition.

" I hope you are right," she said softly, in a thrilled voice. She was thinking that this was the most wonderful, miraculous experience that she had ever had.

V

Silence.

" Now," she thought, " I must go back." Inwardly she gave a delicious sigh.

But just as she was about to take her prim leave, the scarce-discerned figure of her companion stepped out into the garden.

" By Jove ! " said Edwin Clayhanger. " It's beginning to rain, I do believe."

The wind blew, and she felt rain on her check. Clayhanger advised her to stand against the other wall of the porch for better protection. She obeyed. He re-entered the porch, but was still exposed to the rain. She called him to her side. Already he was so close that she could have touched his shoulder by outstretching her arm.

" Oh ! I'm all right ! " he said lightly, and did not move.

" You needn't be afraid of me ! " She was hurt that he had refused her invitation to approach her. The next instant she would have given her tongue not to have uttered those words. But she was in such a tingling state of extreme sensitiveness as rendered it impossible for her to exercise a normal self-control.

Scarcely conscious of what she did, she asked him the time.

He struck a match to look at his watch. The wind blew the match out, but she saw his wistful face, with his disordered hair under the hat. It had the quality of a vision.

He offered to get a light in the house, but abruptly she said good night.

Then they were shaking hands—she knew not how or why. She could not loose his hand. She thought: "Never have I held a hand so honest as this hand." At last she dropped it. They stood silent while a trap rattled up Trafalgar Road. It was as if she was bound to remain moveless until the sounds of the trap had died away.

She walked proudly out into the rain. He called to her: "I say, Miss Lessways!" But she did not stop.

In a minute she was back again in Lane End House.

"That you?" Tom's voice from the breakfast-room.

"Yes," she answered clearly. "I've put the chain on. Good night."

"Good night. Thanks."

She ascended the stairs, smiling to herself, with the rain-drops fresh on her cheek. In her mind were no distinct thoughts, either concerning the non-virtue of belief, or the new epoch, or Edwin Clayhanger, or even the strangeness of her behaviour. But all her being vibrated to the mysterious and beautiful romance of existence.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE NEXT MEETING

#### I

FOR several days the town of Bursley was to Hilda simply a place made perilous and redoubtable by the apprehension of meeting Edwin Clayhanger accidentally in the streets thereof. And the burden of her meditations was: "What can he have thought of me?" She had said nothing to anybody of the deliberately sought adventure in the garden. And with the strangest ingenuous confidence she assumed that Edwin Clayhanger, too, would keep an absolute silence about it. She had therefore naught to fear, except in the privacy of his own mind. She did not blame herself—it never occurred to her to do so—but she rather wondered at herself, inimically, prophesying that one day her impulsiveness would throw her into some serious difficulty. The memory of the night beautifully coloured her whole daily existence. In spite of her avoidance of the town, due to her dread of seeing Clayhanger, she was constantly thinking: "But this cannot continue for ever. One day I am bound to meet him again." And she seemed to be waiting for that day.

It came with inevitable quickness. The last day but one of June was appointed throughout the country for the celebration of the Centenary of Sunday Schools. Neither Hilda nor any of the Orgreave children had ever seen the inside of a Sunday School; and the tendency up at Lane End House was to condescend towards the festival as towards a rejoicing of the proletariat. But in face of the magnitude of the affair, looming more enormous as it approached, this attitude could not be maintained. The preparations for the Centenary filled newspapers and changed the physiognomy of towns. And on the morning of the ceremonial service, gloriously flattered by



the sun, there was candid excitement at the breakfast-table of the Orgreaves. Mr. Orgreave regretted that pressure of work would prevent him from seeing the fun. Tom was going to see the fun at Hanbridge. Jimmie and Johnnie were going to see the fun, but they would not say where. The servants were going to see the fun. Charlie had returned to London. Alicia wanted to go and see the fun, but as she was flushed and feverish, Mrs. Orgreave forbade and decided to remain at home with Alicia. Otherwise, even Mrs. Orgreave would have gone to see the fun. Hilda and Janet apparently hesitated about going, but Mr. Orgreave, pointing out that there could not under the most favourable circumstance be another Centenary of Sunday Schools for at least a hundred years, sarcastically urged them to set forth. The fact was, as Janet teasingly told him while she hung on his neck, that he wished to accentuate as much as possible his own martyrdom to industry. Were not all the shops and offices of the Five Towns closed? Did not every member of his family, save those detained by illness, attend the historic spectacle of the Centenary? He alone had sacrificed pleasure to work. Thus Janet's loving, ironic smiles foretold, would the father of the brood discourse during the next few days.

## II

Hilda and Janet accordingly went down a beflagged and sunlit Trafalgar Road together. Janet was wearing still another white dress, and Hilda, to her marked relief, had abandoned black for a slate-coloured frock made by a dress-maker in Bleakridge. It was Mrs. Orgreave herself who had first counselled Hilda, if she hated black, as she said she did, to abandon black. The entire family chorus had approved.

The risk of encountering Edwin Clayhanger on that day of multitudes was surely infinitesimal. Nevertheless, in six minutes the improbable had occurred. At the corner of Trafalgar Road and Duck Square Janet, attracted by the sight of banners in the distance, turned to the left along Wedgwood Street and past the front of Clayhanger's shop. Theoretically shops were closed, but one shutter of Clayhanger's was down, and in its place stood Edwin Clayhanger. Hilda felt her features stiffening into a sort of wilful and

insincere hostility as she shook hands. Within the darkness of the shop she saw the figure of two dowdy women—doubtless the sisters of whom Janet had told her ; they disappeared before Janet and Hilda entered.

“ It has happened ! I have seen him again ! ” Hilda said to herself as she sat in the shop listening to Janet and to Edwin Clayhanger. It appeared likely that Edwin Clayhanger would join them in the enterprise of witnessing the historic spectacle.

A few minutes later everybody was startled by the gay apparition of Osmond Orgreave swinging his cane. Curiosity had been too much for industriousness, and Osmond Orgreave had yielded himself to the general interest.

“ Oh ! Father ! ” cried Janet. “ What a deceitful thing you are ! ”

“ Only a day or two ago,” Hilda was thinking, “ I had never even heard of him. And his shop seemed so strange and romantic to me. And now I am sitting in his shop like an old friend. And nobody suspects that he and I have had a secret meeting ! ” The shop itself seemed to be important and prosperous.

Mr. Orgreave, having decided for pleasure, was anxious to find it at once, and, under his impatience, they left the shop. Janet went out first with her gay father. Edwin Clayhanger waited respectfully for Hilda to pass. But just as she was about to step forth she caught sight of George Cannon coming along the opposite side of Wedgwood Street in the direction of Trafalgar Road ; he was in close conversation with another man. She kept within the shelter of the shop until the two had gone by. She did not want to meet George Cannon, with whom she had not had speech since the interview at the Cedars ; he had written to her about the property sales, and she had replied. There was no reason why she should hesitate to meet him. But she wished not to complicate the situation. She thought : “ If he saw me, he'd come across and speak to me, and I might have to introduce him to all these people, and goodness knows what ! ” The contretemps caused her heart to beat.

When they emerged from the shop Janet, a few yards ahead with Mr. Orgreave, was beckoning.

## III

Hilda stood on a barrel by the side of Edwin Clayhanger on another barrel. There, from the top of St. Luke's Square, they surveyed a vast rectangular carpet of upturned faces that made a pattern of pale dots on a coloured and black groundwork. Nearly all the children of Bursley, thousands upon thousands, were massed in the Square, wedged in tight together, so that there seemed not to be an inch of space anywhere between the shuttered shop fronts on the east of the Square and the shuttered shop fronts on the west of the Square. At the bottom of the Square a row of railway lorries were crammed with tiny babes—or such they appeared—toddlers too weak to walk in processions. At the top of the Square a large platform full of bearded adults rose like an island out of the unconscious sea of infants. And from every window of every house adults looked down in safe ease upon that wavy ocean over which banners gleamed in the dazzling and fierce sunshine.

She might have put up her sunshade. But she would not do so. She thought: "If all those children can stand the sun without fainting, I can!" She was extraordinarily affected by the mere sight of the immense multitude of children; they were as helpless and as fatalistic as sheep, utterly at the mercy of the adults who had herded them. There was about them a collective wistfulness that cut the heart; to dwell on the idea of it would have brought her to tears. And when the multitude sang, so lustily, so willingly, so bravely, pouring forth with the brass instruments a volume of tone enormous and majestic, she had a tightness of the throat that was excruciating. The Centenary of Sunday Schools was quite other than she had expected; she had not bargained for these emotions.

It was after the hymn "There is a fountain filled with blood," during the quietude of a speech, that Edwin Clayhanger, taking up an evangelistic phrase in the speech, whispered to her:

"More blood!"

"What?" she asked, amazed by his ironical accent, which jarred on her mood, and also by his familiar manner of leaning towards her and dropping the words in her ear.

"Well," he said. "Look at it! It only wants the Ganges at the bottom of the Square!"

Evidently for Edwin Clayhanger all religions were equally heathenish! She was quite startled out of her amazement, and her response was an almost humble entreaty not to make fun. The next moment she regretted that she had not answered him with sharp firmness. She was somewhat out of humour with him. He had begun by losing sight of Mr. Orgreave and Janet—and of course it was hopeless to seek for them in those thronging streets around St. Luke's Square. Then he had said to her, in a most peculiar tone: "I hope you didn't catch cold in the rain the other night," and she had not liked that. She had regarded it as a fault in tact, almost as a sexual disloyalty on his part to refer at all to the scene in the garden. Finally, his way of negotiating with the barrel man for the use of two barrels had been lacking, for Hilda, in the qualities of largeness and masterfulness; any one of the Orgreave boys would, she was sure, have carried the thing off in a more worldly manner.

The climax of the service came with the singing of "When I survey the wondrous Cross." The physical effect of it on Hilda was nearly overwhelming. The terrible and sublime words seemed to surge upon her charged with all the multitudinous significance of the crowd. She was profoundly stirred, and to prevent an outburst of tears she shook her head.

"What's the matter?" said Edwin Clayhanger.

"Clumsy dolt!" she thought. "Haven't you got enough sense to leave me alone?" And she said aloud, passionately transforming her weakness into ferocity: "That's the most splendid religious verse ever written! You can say what you like. It's worth while believing anything, if you can sing words like that and mean them!"

He agreed that the hymn was fine.

"Do you know who wrote it?" she demanded threateningly.

He did not. She was delighted.

"Dr. Watts, of course!" she said, with a scornful sneer. What did Janet mean by saying that he had read simply everything?

## IV

An episode which supervened close to their barrels did a great deal to intensify the hostility of her mood. On the edge of the crowd an old man, who had been trying to force his way through it, was being guyed by a gang of louts who had surrounded an ice-cream barrow. Suddenly she recognized this old man. His name was Shushions; he was a familiar figure of the streets of Turnhill, and he had the reputation of being the oldest Sunday School teacher in the Five Towns. He was indeed exceedingly old, foolish, and undignified in senility; and the louts were odiously jeering at his defenceless dotage, and a young policeman was obviously with the louts and against the aged, fatuous victim.

Hilda gave an exclamation of revolt, and called upon Edwin Clayhanger to go to the rescue of Mr. Shushions. Not he, however, but she, jumped down first and pushed towards the barrow. She made the path, and he followed. She protested to the policeman, and he too modestly seconded her. Yet the policeman, ignoring her, addressed himself to Edwin Clayhanger. Hilda was infuriated. It appeared that old Mr. Shushions had had a ticket for the platform, but had lost it.

"He must be got on to the platform somehow!" she decided, with a fiery glance.

But Edwin Clayhanger seemed to be incapable of a heroic action. He hesitated. The policeman hesitated. Fortunately, the plight of the doting oldest Sunday School teacher in the Five Towns had been observed from the platform, and two fussy, rosetted officials bustled up and offered to take charge of him. And Hilda, dissolving in painful pity, bent over him softly and arranged his disordered clothes; she was weeping.

"Shall we go back to our barrels?" Edwin Clayhanger rather sheepishly suggested after Mr. Shushions had been dragged away.

But she would not go back to the barrels.

"I think it's time we set about to find Janet and Mr. Orgreave," she replied coldly, and they drew out of the crowd. She was profoundly deceived in Edwin Clayhanger, so famous for his presence of mind in saving printing-shops from destruc-



tion ! She did not know what he ought to have done ; she made no attempt to conceive what he ought to have done. But that he ought to have done something—something decisive and grandly masculine—she was sure.

## V

Later, after sundry adventures, and having found Mr. Orgreave and Janet, they stood at the tail of the steam-car, which Janet had decided should carry her up to Bleakridge ; and Edwin shook hands. Yes, Hilda was profoundly deceived in him. Nevertheless, his wistful and honest glance, as he parted from her, had its effect. If he had not one quality, he had another. She tried hard to maintain her scorn of him, but it was exceedingly difficult to do so.

Mr. Orgreave wiped his brow as the car jolted them out of the tumult of the Centenary. It was hot, but he did not seem to be in the slightest degree fatigued or dispirited, whereas Janet put back her head and shut her eyes.

“ Caught sight of a friend of yours this morning, Hilda ! ” he said pleasantly.

“ Oh ! ”

“ Yes. Mr. Cannon. By the way, I forgot to tell you yesterday that his famous newspaper—*yours*—has come to an end.” He spoke, as it were, with calm sympathy. “ Yes ! Well, it’s not surprising, not surprising ! Nothing’s ever stood up against the ‘ Signal ’ yet ! ”

Hilda was saddened. When they reached Lane End House, a few seconds in front of the hurrying and apologetic servants, Mrs. Orgreave told her that Mr. George Cannon had called to see her, and had left a note for her. She ran up to her room with the note. It said merely that the writer wished to have an interview with her at once.

## BOOK III

### HER BURDEN

#### CHAPTER I

#### HILDA INDISPENSABLE

##### I

**H**ILDA made no response of any kind to George Cannon's request for an immediate interview, allowing day after day to pass in inactivity, and wondering the while how she might excuse or explain her singular conduct when circumstances should bring the situation to a head. She knew that she ought either to go over to Turnhill, or write him with an appointment to see her at Lane End House ; but she did nothing ; nor did she say a word of the matter to Janet in the bedroom at nights. All that she could tell herself was that she did not want to see George Cannon ; she was not honestly persuaded that she feared to see him. In the meantime, Edwin Clayhanger was invisible, though the removal of the Clayhanger household to the new residence at Bleakridge had made a considerable stir of straw and litter in Trafalgar Road.

On Tuesday in the following week she received a letter from Sarah Gailey. It was brought up to her room early in the morning by a half-dressed Alicia Orgreave, and she read it as she lay in bed. Sarah Gailey, struggling with the complexities of the Cedars, away in Hornsey, was unwell and gloomily desolate. She wrote that she suffered from terrible headaches on waking, and that she was often feverish and that she had no energy whatever. " I am at a very trying age for a woman," she said. " I don't know whether you understand, but I've come to a time of life that really upsets one above a bit, and I'm fit for nothing." Hilda understood ;

she was flattered, even touched, by this confidence ; it made her feel older, and more important in the world, and a whole generation away from Alicia, who was drawing up the blind with the cries and awkward gestures of a prattling infant. To the letter there was a postscript : " Has George been to see you yet about me ? He wrote me he should, but I haven't heard since. In fact, I've been waiting to hear. I'll say nothing about that yet. I'm ashamed you should be bothered. It's so important for you to have a good holiday. Again, much love, S. G." The prim handwriting got smaller and smaller towards the end of the postscript and the end of the page, and the last lines were perfectly parallel with the lower edge of the paper ; all the others sloped feebly downwards from left to right.

" Oh ! " piped Alicia from the window. " Maggie Clayhanger has got her curtains up in the drawing-room ! Oh ! Aren't they proud things ! Oh !—I do believe she's caught me staring at her ! " And Alicia withdrew abruptly into the room, blushing for her detected sin of ungenteel curiosity. She bumped down on the bed. " Three days more," she said. " Not counting to-day. Four, counting to-day."

" School ? "

Alicia nodded, her finger in her mouth. " Isn't it horrid, going to school on a day like this ? I hear you and Janet are off up to Hillport this afternoon again, to play tennis. You do have times ! "

" No," said Hilda. " I've got to go to Turnhill this afternoon."

" But Janet told me you were——" Her glance fell on the letter. " Is it business ? "

" Yes."

The child was impressed, and her change of tone, her frank awe, gave pleasure to Hilda's vanity. " Shall I go and tell Jan ? She isn't near dressed."

" Yes, do."

Off scampered Alicia, leaving the door unlatched behind her.

Hilda gazed at the letter, holding it limply in her left hand amid the soft disorder of the counterpane. It had come to her, an intolerably pathetic messenger and accuser, out of the exacerbating frowziness of the Cedars. Yesterday

afternoon care-ridden Sarah Gailey was writing it, with sighs, at the desk in her stuffy, uncomfortable bedroom. As Hilda gazed at the formation of the words, she could see the unhappy Sarah Gailey writing them, and the letter was like a bit of Sarah Gailey's self, magically and disconcertingly projected into the spacious, laughing home of the Orgreaves, and into the mysterious new happiness that was forming around Hilda. The Orgreaves, so far as Hilda could discover, had no real anxieties. They were a joyous lot, favoured alike by temperament and by fortune. And she, Hilda—what real anxieties had she? None! She was sure of a small but adequate income. Her grief for her mother was assuaged. The problem of her soul no longer troubled: in part it had been solved, and in part it had faded imperceptibly away. Nor was she exercised about the future, about the 'new life.' Instead of rushing ardently to meet the future, she felt content to wait for its coming. Why disturb oneself? She was free. She was enjoying existence with the Orgreaves. Yes, she was happy in this roseate passivity.

The letter shook her, arousing as it did the sharp sense of her indebtedness to Sarah Gailey, who alone had succoured her in her long period of despairing infelicity. Had she guessed that it was Sarah Gailey's affair upon which George Cannon had desired to see her, she would not have delayed an hour; no reluctance to meet George Cannon would have caused her to tarry. But she had not guessed; the idea had never occurred to her.

She rose, picked up the envelope from the carpet, carefully replaced the letter in it, and laid it with love on the glittering dressing-table. Through the unlatched door she heard a tramping of unshod masculine feet in the passage, and the delightful curt greeting of Osmond Orgreave and his sleepy son Jimmie—splendid powerful males. She glanced at the garden, and at the garden of the Clayhangers, swimming in fresh sunshine. She glanced in the mirror, and saw the deshabelle of her black hair and of her insecure nightgown, and thought: "Truly, I am not so bad-looking! And how well I feel! How fond they all are of me! I'm just at the right age. I'm young, but I'm mature. I've had a lot of experience, and I'm not a fool. I'm strong—I could stand any-

thing!" She put her shoulders back, with a challenging gesture. The pride of life was hers.

And then, this disturbing vision of Sarah Gailey, alone, unhappy, unattractive, enfeebled, ageing—ageing! It seemed to her inexpressibly cruel that people must grow old and weak and desolate; it seemed monstrous. A pang, momentary, but excruciating, smote her. She said to herself: "Sarah Gailey has nothing to look forward to, except worry. Sarah Gailey is at the end, instead of at the beginning!"

## II

When she got off the train at Turnhill station, early that afternoon, she had no qualm at the thought of meeting George Cannon; she was not even concerned to invent a decent excuse for her silence in relation to his urgent letter. She went to see him for the sake of Sarah Gailey, and because she apparently might be of use in some affair of Sarah's—she knew not what. She was proud that either Sarah or he thought that she could be of use, or that it was worth while consulting her. She had a grave air, as of one to whom esteem has brought responsibilities.

In Child Street, leading to High Street, she passed the office of Godlimans, the auctioneers. And there, among a group of white posters covering the large window, was a poster of the sale of "valuable household furniture and effects removed from No. 15, Lessways Street." And on the poster, in a very black line by itself, stood out saliently the phrase: "Massive Bedroom Suite." Her mother's! Hers! She had to stop and read the poster through, though she was curiously afraid of being caught in the act. All the principal items were mentioned by the faithful auctioneers; and the furniture, thus described, had a strange aspect of special importance, as if it had been subtly better, more solid, more desirable, than any other houseful of furniture in the town—Lessways' furniture! She sought for the date. The sale had taken place on the previous night, at the very hour when she was lolling and laughing in the drawing-room of Lane End House with the Orgreaves! The furniture was sold, dispersed, gone! The house was empty! The past was irremediably closed! The realization of this naturally



affected her, raising phantoms of her mother, and of the face of the cab-driver as he remarked on the drawn blinds at the Cedars. But she was still more affected by the thought that the poster was on the window, and the furniture scattered, solely because she had willed it. She had said: "Please sell all the furniture, and you needn't consult me about the sale. I don't want to know. I prefer not to know. Just get it done." And it had been done! How mysteriously romantic! Some girls would not have sold the furniture, would not have dared to sell it, would have accepted the furniture and the house as a solemn charge, and gone on living among those relics, obedient to a tradition. But she had dared! She had willed—and the solid furniture had vanished away! And she was adventurously free!

She went forward. At the corner of Child Street and High Street the new Town Hall was rising to the skies. Already its walls were higher than the highest house in the vicinity. And workmen were crawling over it, amid dust, and a load of crimson bricks was trembling and revolving upwards on a thin rope that hung down from the blue. Glimpses of London had modified old estimates of her native town. Nevertheless, the new Town Hall still appeared extraordinarily large and important to her.

She saw the detested Arthur Dayson in the distance of the street, and crossed hurriedly to the Square, looking fixedly at the storey above the ironmonger's so that Arthur Dayson could not possibly catch her eye. There was no sign of the "Five Towns Chronicle" in the bare windows of the second storey. This did not surprise her; but she was startled by the absence of the Karkeek wire-blinds from the first-floor windows, equally bare with those of the second. When she got to the entrance she was still more startled to observe that the Karkeek brass-plate had been removed. She climbed the long stairs apprehensively.

### III

"Anybody here?" she called out timidly. She was in the clerks' office, which was empty; but she could hear movements in another room. The place seemed in process of being dismantled.

Suddenly George Cannon appeared in a doorway, frowning.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Cannon!"

"Good afternoon, Miss Lessways." He spoke with stiff politeness. His face looked weary.

After a slight hesitation he advanced, and they shook hands. Hilda was nervous. Her neglect of his letter now presented itself to her as inexcusable. She thought: "If he is vexed about it I shall have to humour him. I really can't blame him. He must think me very queer."

"I was wondering what had become of you," he said, amply polite, but not cordial.

"Well," she said, "every day I was expecting you to call again, or to send me a note or something. . . . And what with one thing and another——"

"I dare say your time's been fully occupied," he filled up her pause. And she fancied that he spoke in a peculiar tone. She absurdly fancied that he was referring to the time which she had publicly spent with Edwin Clayhanger at the Centenary. She conceived that he might have seen her and Edwin Clayhanger together.

"I had a letter from Miss Gailey this morning," she said. "And it seems that it's about her that you wanted——"

"Yes."

"I do wish I'd known. If I'd had the slightest idea I should have come over instantly." She spoke with eager seriousness, and then added, smiling as if in appeal to be favourably understood: "I thought it was only about *my* affairs—sale or what not. And as I'd asked you to manage all these things exactly as you thought best, I didn't trouble——"

He laughed, and either forgave or forgot.

"Will you come this way?" he invited, in a new tone of friendliness. "We're rather in a mess here."

"You're all alone, too," she said, following him into his room.

"Sowter's out," he answered laconically, waiting for her to precede him. He said nothing as to the office-boy, nor as to Mr. Karkeek. Hilda was now sure that something strange had happened.

"So you've heard from Sarah, have you?" he began, when they were both seated in his own room. There were still a lot of papers, though fewer than of old, on the broad desk; but the bookcase was quite empty, and several of the shelves in it had slipped from the horizontal; the front part of the shelves was a pale yellow, and behind that, an irregular dark band of dust indicated the varying depths of the vanished tomes. The forlornness of the bookcase gave a stricken air to the whole room.

"She's not well."

"Or she imagines she's not well."

"Oh no!" said Hilda warmly. "It isn't imagination. She really isn't well."

"You think so?"

"I don't think—I know!" Hilda spoke proudly, but with the restraint which absolute certainty permits. She crushed, rather than resented, George Cannon's easy insinuation, full of the unjustified superiority of the male. How could he judge—how could any man judge? She had never before felt so sure of herself, so adult and experienced, as she felt then.

"But it's nothing serious?" he suggested with deference.

"N—no—not what you'd call serious," said Hilda judicially, mysteriously.

"Because she wants to give up the boarding-house business altogether—that's all!"

Having delivered this dramatic blow, George Cannon smiled, as it were, quizzically. And Hilda was reassured about him. She had been thinking: "Is he ruined? If he is not ruined, what is the meaning of these puzzling changes here?" And she had remembered her shrewd mother's hints, and her own later fears, concerning the insecurity of his position: and had studied his tired and worn face for an equivocal sign. But this smile, self-confident and firm, was not the smile of a ruined man; and his flashing glance seemed to be an omen of definite success.

"Wants to give it up?" exclaimed Hilda.

He nodded.

"But why? I thought she was doing rather well."

"So she is."

"Then why?"

"Ah!" George Cannon lifted his head with a gesture signifying enigma. "That's just what I wanted to ask you. Hasn't she said anything to you?"

"As to giving it up? No! . . . So it was this that you wanted to see me about?"

He nodded. "She wrote me a few days after you came away, and suggested I should see you and ask you what you thought."

"But why me?"

"Well, she thinks the world of you, Sarah does."

Hilda thought: "How strange! She did nothing but look after me, and wait on me hand and foot, and I never helped her in any way; and yet she turns to me!" And she was extremely flattered and gratified, and was aware of a delicious increase of self-respect.

"But supposing she does give it up?" Hilda said aloud. "What will she do?"

"Exactly!" said George Cannon, and then, in a very confidential, ingratiating manner: "I wish you'd write to her and put some reason into her. She mustn't give it up. With her help—and you know in the management she's simply wonderful—with her help, I think I shall be able to bring something about that'll startle folks. Only, she mustn't throw me over. And she mustn't get too crotchety with the boarders. I've had some difficulty in that line, as it is. In fact, I've had to be rather cross. You know about the Boutwoods, for instance! Well, I've smoothed that over. . . . It's nothing, nothing—if she'll keep her head. If she'll keep her head it's a gold mine—you'll see! Only—she wants a bit of managing. If you'd write——"

"I shan't write," said Hilda. "I shall go and see her—at once. I should have gone in any case, after her letter this morning saying how unwell she is. She wants company. She was so kind to me I couldn't possibly leave her in the lurch. I can't very well get away to-day, but I shall go to-morrow, and I shall drop her a line to-night."

"It's very good of you, I'm sure," said George Cannon. Obviously he was much relieved.

"Not at all!" Hilda protested. She felt very content and happy.

"The fact is," he went on, "there's nobody but you can do it. Your mother was the only real friend she ever had. And this is the first time she's been left alone up there, you see. I'm quite sure you can save the situation."

He was frankly depending on her for something which he admitted he could not accomplish himself. Those two people, George Cannon and Sarah Gailey, had both instinctively turned to her in a crisis. None could do what she could do. She, by the force of her individuality, could save the situation. She was no longer a girl, but a mature and influential being. Her ancient diffidence before George Cannon had completely gone; she had no qualms, no foreboding, no dubious sensation of weakness. Indeed, she felt herself in one respect his superior, for his confidence in Sarah Gailey's housewifely skill, his conviction that it was unique and would be irreplaceable, struck her as somewhat naïf, as being yet another example of the absurd family pride which she and her mother had often noticed in the Five Towns. She was not happy at the prospect of so abruptly quitting the delights of Lane End House and the vicinity of Edwin Clayhanger; she was not happy at the prospect of postponing the consideration of plans for her own existence; she was not happy at the prospect of Sarah Gailey's pessimistic complainings. She was above happiness. She was above even that thrill of sharp and intense vitality which in times past had ennobled trouble and misery. She had the most exquisite feeling of triumphant self-justification. She was splendidly conscious of power. She was indispensable.

And the dismantled desolation of the echoing office, and the mystery of George Cannon's personal position, somehow gave a strange poignancy to her mood.

They talked of indifferent matters: her property, the Orgreaves, even the defunct newspaper, as to which George Cannon shrugged his shoulders. Then the conversation drooped.

"I shall go up by the four train to-morrow," she said, clinching the interview, and rising.

"I may go up by that train myself," said George Cannon.

She started. "Oh! are you going to Hornsey too?"

"No! Not Hornsey. I've other business."



## CHAPTER II

### SARAH'S BENEFACTOR

#### I

ON the following afternoon Hilda travelled alone by the local train from Bleakridge to Knype, the central station where all voyagers for London, Birmingham, and Manchester had to forgather in order to take the fast expresses that unwillingly halted there, and there only, in their skimming flights across the district. It was a custom of Five Towns hospitality that a departing guest should be accompanied as far as Knype and stowed with personal attentions into the big train. But on this occasion Hilda had wished otherwise. "I should *prefer* nobody to go with me to Knype," she had said, in a characteristic tone, to Janet. It was enough. The family had wondered; but it was enough. The family knew its singular, its mysterious Hilda. And instead of at Knype, the leave-takings had occurred at the little wayside station of Bleakridge, with wavy moorland behind, factory chimneys in front, and cinder and shawd heaps all around. Hilda had told Janet: "Mr. Cannon may be meeting me at Knype. He's probably going to London too." And the discreet Janet, comprehending Hilda, had not even mentioned this fact to the rest of the family.

George Cannon, in a light summer suit and straw hat, was already on the platform at Knype. Hilda had feared that at Bleakridge he might be looking out of the window of the local train, which started from Turnhill; she had desired not to meet him in the presence of any of the Orgreaves. But either he had caught the previous train to Knype, or he had driven down. Holding a Gladstone bag and a stick in one hand, he stood talking to another man of about his own age and height. The conversation was vivacious, at any rate on George Cannon's part. Hilda passed close by him amid

the populous stir of the expectant platform. He saw her, turned, and raised his hat, but in a perfunctory, preoccupied manner ; and instantly resumed the speech to his companion. Hilda recognized the latter. It was ' young Lawton,' son and successor to ' old Lawton,' the most famous lawyer in the Five Towns. Young Lawton had a branch office at Turnhill, and lived in an important house half-way between Turnhill and Bursley, where, behind the Town Hall, was the historic principal office of the firm.

The express came loudly in, and Hilda, having climbed into a second-class compartment, leaned out from it, to descry her porter and bestow on him a threepenny-bit. George Cannon and young Lawton were still in argument, and apparently quite indifferent to the train. Young Lawton's thin face had its usual faint, harsh smile ; his limbs were moveless in an exasperating and obstinate calm ; Hilda detested the man from his mere looks. But George Cannon was very obviously under excitement. His face was flushed ; he moved his free arm violently—even the Gladstone bag swung to and fro ; he punctuated his sentences with sharp, angry nods of the head, insisting and protesting and insisting, while the other, saying much less, maintained his damnable stupid disdainful grin.

Would he let the train go, in his feverish preoccupation ? Hilda was seriously afraid that he would. The last trunks were flung into the front van, the stationmaster in his tall hat waved curtly to the glittering guard ; the guard waved his flag, and whistled ; a porter banged the door of Hilda's compartment, ignoring her gestures ; the engine whistled. And at that moment George Cannon, throwing apparently a last malediction at young Lawton, sprang towards the train, and, seeing Hilda's face, rushed to the door which she strained to open again.

" I was afraid you'd be left behind," she said, as he dropped his bag on the seat and the affronted stationmaster himself shut the door.

" Not quite ! " ejaculated Cannon grimly.

The smooth, irresistible gliding of the train became apparent, establishing a sudden aloof calm. Hilda perceived that all her muscles were tense.

In the compartment was a middle-aged couple.

"What's this place?" asked the woman.

"Looks like Tamworth," said the man sleepily.

"Knype, sir!" George Cannon corrected him very sharply. He was so wrought up that he had omitted even to shake hands with Hilda. Making no effort to talk, and showing no curiosity about Hilda's welfare or doings, he moved uneasily on his seat, and from time to time opened and shut the Gladstone bag. Gradually the flush paled from his face.

At Lichfield the middle-aged couple took advice from a porter and stumbled out of the train.

## II

"We're fairly out of the smoke now," said Hilda, when the train began to move again. As a fact, they had been fairly out of the smoke of the Five Towns for more than half an hour; but Hilda spoke at random, timidly, nervously, for the sake of speaking. And she was as apologetic as though it was she herself who by some untimely discretion had annoyed George Cannon.

"Yes, thank God!" he replied fiercely, blowing with pleasure upon the embers of his resentment. "And I'll take good care I never go into it again—to live, that is!"

"Really?" she murmured, struck into an extreme astonishment.

He produced a cigar and a match-box.

"May I?" he demanded carelessly, and accepted her affirmative as of course.

"You've heard about my little affair?" he asked, after lighting the cigar. And he gazed at her curiously.

"No."

"Do you mean to say that none of the Orgreaves have said anything this last day or two?" He leaned forward. They were in opposite corners.

"No," she repeated stiffly. Nevertheless, she remembered a peculiar glance of Tom's to his father on the previous day, when George Cannon's name had been mentioned.

"Well," said he. "You surprise me! That's all!"

"But——" She stopped, full of misgivings.

"Never heard any gossip about me—never?" he persisted, as it were, menacing her.

She shook her head.

"Never heard that I'm not really a solicitor?"

"Oh! well—— I think mother once did say something——"

"I thought so."

"But I don't understand those things," she said simply.

"Is anything the matter? Is——?"

"Nothing!" he replied, calm and convincing. "Only I've been done! Done! You'll hear about it some day, I dare say. . . . Shall I tell you? Would you like me to tell you?" He smiled rather boyishly and leaned back.

"Yes," she nodded.

His attitude was very familiar, recalling their former relation of employer and employed. It seemed as natural to her as to him that he should not too ceremoniously conceal his feelings or disguise his mood.

"Well, you see, I expect I know as much about law as any of 'em, but I've never been admitted, and so——" He stopped, perceiving that she did not comprehend the significance of such a word as 'admitted.' "If you want to practise as a solicitor you have to pass examinations, and I never have passed examinations. Very expensive, all that! And I couldn't afford when I was young. It isn't the exams that are difficult—you may tell that from the fellows that pass them. Lawton, for instance. But after a certain age exams become a nuisance. However, I could do everything else. I might have had half a dozen situations as managing clerk in the Five Towns if I'd wanted. Only I didn't want! I wanted to be on my own. I could get clients as quick as any of them. *And* quicker! So I found Karkeek—the excellent Mr. Karkeek! Another of the bright ones that could pass the exams! Oh! He'd passed the exams all right! He'd spent five years and I don't know how many hundred pounds in passing the exams, and with it all he couldn't get above a couple of pounds a week. There are hundreds of real solicitors up and down the country who aren't earning more. And they aren't worth more. But I gave him more, and a lot more. Just to use his name on my door and my blinds. See?

In theory I was his clerk, but in reality he was mine. It was all quite clear. He understood—I should think he did, by Jove!" George Cannon laughed shortly. "Every one understood. I got a practice together in no time. *He* didn't do it. He wouldn't have got a practice together in a thousand years. I had the second-best practice in Turnhill, and I should soon have had the best—if I hadn't been done."

"Yes?" said Hilda. The confidence flattered her.

"Well, Karkeek came into some money,—and he simply walked out of the office! Simply walked out! Didn't give me time to turn round. I'd always treated him properly. But he was jealous."

"What a shame!" Hilda's scorn shrivelled up Mr. Karkeek. There was nothing that she detested so much as a disloyalty.

"Yes. I couldn't stop him, of course. No formal agreement between us. Couldn't be, in a case like ours! So he had me. He'd taken my wages quick enough as long as it suited him. Then he comes into money, and behaves like that. Jealousy! They were all jealous,—always had been. I was doing too well. So I had the whole gang down on me instantly like a thousand of bricks. They knew I was helpless, and so they came on. Special meeting of the committee of the North Staffordshire Law Society, if you please! Rumours of prosecution—oh yes! I don't know what! . . . All because I wouldn't take the trouble to pass their wretched exams. . . . Why, I could pass their exams on my head, if I hadn't anything better to do. But I have. At first I thought I'd retire for five years and pass their exams, and then come back and make 'em sit up. And wouldn't I have made 'em sit up! But then I said to myself, 'No. It isn't good enough.'"

Hilda frowned. "What isn't?"

"What? The Five Towns isn't good enough! I can find something better than the law, and I can find something better than the Five Towns! . . . And here young Lawton has the impudence to begin to preach to me on Knype platform, and to tell me I'm wise in going! He's the President of the local Law Society, you know! No end of a President! And hasn't even got gumption enough to keep his father's



practice together! Stupid ass! Well, I let him have it, and straight! He's no worse than the rest. They've got no brains in this district. And they're so narrow—narrow isn't the word! Thick-headed's the word. Stupid! Mean! . . . Mean! . . . What did it matter to them? I kept to all their rules. There was a real solicitor on the premises, and there'd soon have been another, if I'd had time. No concern of theirs how the money was divided between me and the real solicitor. But they were jealous—there you are! They don't understand enterprise. They hate it. Nothing ever moves in the Five Towns. And they've got no manners—I do believe that's the worst. Look at Lawton's manners! Nothing but a boor! They aren't civilized yet—that's what's the matter with them! That's what my father used to say. Barbarians, he used to say. '*Ce sont des barbares!*' . . . Kids used to throw stones at him because of his neck-tie. The grown-ups chuck a brick at anything they don't quite fancy. That's their idea of wit."

Hilda was afraid of his tempestuous mood. But she enjoyed her fear, as she might have enjoyed exposure to a dangerous storm. She enjoyed the sensation of her fragility and helplessness there, cooped up with him in the close intimacy of the compartment. She was glad that he did not apologize to her for his lack of restraint, nor foolishly pretend that he was boring her.

"It does seem a shame!" she murmured, her eyes candidly admitting that she felt enormously flattered.

He sighed and laughed. "How often have I heard my father say that—'*Ce sont des barbares!*' Peels only brought him over because they could find nobody in the Five Towns civilized enough to do the work that he did. . . . I can imagine how he must have felt when he first came here! . . . My God! . . . Environment! . . . I tell you what—it's only lately I've realized how I loathe the provinces!"

The little interior in which they were, swept steadily and smoothly across the central sunlit plain of England, passing canals and brooks and cottages and churches—silent and stolid in that English stupidity that he was criticizing. And Hilda saw of George Cannon all that was French in him. She saw him quite anew, as something rather exotic and entirely

marvellous. She thought: "When I first met him, I said to myself he was a most extraordinary man. And I was right. I was more right than I ever imagined. No one down there has any idea of what he really is. They're too stupid, as he says."

He imposed on her his scorn of the provincial. She had to share it. She had a vision of the Five Towns as a smoky blotch on the remote horizon,—negligible, crass, ridiculous in its heavy self-complacency. The very Orgreaves themselves were tinged with this odious English provincialism.

He smiled to himself, and then said, very quietly: "It isn't of the least importance, you know. In fact I'm rather glad. I've never had any difficulty in making money, and when I've settled up everything down there I shan't be precisely without. And I shall have no excuse for not branching out in a new line."

She meekly encouraged him to continue.

"Oh yes!" he went on. "The law isn't the only thing—not by a long way. And besides, I'm sick of it. Do you know what the great thing of the future is, I mean the really great thing—the smashing big thing?" He smiled, kindly and confidential.

She, too, smiled, shaking her head.

"Well, I'll tell you. Hotels!"

"Hotels?" She was perfectly nonplussed.

"Hotels! There'll be more money and more fun to be got out of hotels, soon, than out of any other kind of enterprise in the world. You should see those hotels that are going up in London! They'd give you a start, and no mistake! Yes, hotels! There aren't twenty people in England who know what a hotel is! But I know!" He paused, and added reflectively, in a comically naïve tone: "Curious how these things come to you, bit by bit! Now if it hadn't been for Sarah—and that boarding-house——"

He was using his straw hat as a fan. With an unexpected and almost childlike gesture he suddenly threw the hat up on to the rack above his head. "How's that?"

"What a boy he is, after all!" thought Hilda sympathetically, wondering why in the midst of all her manifold astonishment she felt so light-hearted and gay.

"Funny parcel you've got up there!" he idly observed, glancing from one rack to the other.

The parcel contained Mrs. Orgreave's generous conception of a repast proper to be eaten in a train in place of high tea. He helped her to eat it.

As the train approached London he resumed his manhood. And he was impeccably adult as he conducted her from Euston to King's Cross, and put her into a train in a corner of the station that the summer twilight had already taken possession of.

### III

Late at night Hilda sat with Sarah Gailey in the landlady's small bedroom at the Cedars. It was lighted by a lamp, because the builder of the house, hating excess, had thought fit not to carry gas-pipes higher than the first floor. A large but old bedstead filled half the floor space. On the shabby dressing-table a pile of bills and various papers lay near the lamp. Clothes were hung behind the door, and a vague wisp of muslin moved slightly in the warm draught from the tiny open window. There were two small cane-chairs, enamelled, on which the women sat, close to each other, both incommoded by the unwholesome sultriness of the only chamber that could be spared for the private use of the house-mistress. This small bedroom was Sarah Gailey's home; its amenities were the ultimate nightly reward of her labours. If George Cannon had obtained possession of the Cedars as an occupation for Sarah, this room and Sarah's pleasure therein were the sole justification of the entire mansion.

As Hilda looked at Sarah Gailey's bowed head, but little greyed, beneath the ray of the lamp, and at her shrivelled, neurotic, plaintive face in shadow, and at her knotty hands loosely clasped, she contrasted her companion and the scene with the youthfulness and the spaciousness and the sturdy gay vigour of existence in the household of the Orgreaves. She thought, with a renewed sense of the mysterious strangeness of life: "Last night I was there, far away—all those scores of miles of fields and towns are between!—and to-night I am here. Down there I was nothing but an idler. Here I am the strongest. I am indispensable. I am the one person

on whom she depends. Without me everything will go to pieces." And she thought of George Cannon's vast enigmatic projects concerning grand hotels. In passing the immense pile of St. Pancras on the way from Euston to King's Cross, George Cannon had waved his hand and said: "Look at that! Look at that! It's something after that style that I want for a toy! And I'll have it!" Yes, the lofty turrets of St. Pancras had not intimidated him. He, fresh from little Turnhill and from defeats, could rise at once to the height of them, and by the force of imagination make them his own! He could turn abruptly from the law—to hotels! A disconcerting man! And the mere tone in which he mentioned his enterprise seemed, in a most surprising way, to dignify hotels, and even boarding-houses; to give romance to the perfectly unromantic business of lodging and catering! . . . And the seed from which he was to grow the magic plant sat in the room there with Hilda: that bowed head! The ambition and the dream resembled St. Pancras: the present reality was the Cedars, and Sarah's poor, stuffy little bedroom in the Cedars.

Sarah began to cry, weakly.

"But what's the matter?" asked Hilda, the strong succourer.

"Nothing. Only it's such a relief to me you've come."

Hilda deprecated lightly. "I should have come sooner if I'd known. You ought to have sent word before."

"No, I couldn't. After all, what is it? I'm only silly. There's nothing really the matter. The minute you come I can see that. I can even stand those Boutwoods if you're here. You know George made it up with them; and I won't say he wasn't right. But I had to put my pride in my pocket. And yesterday it nearly made me scream out to see Mrs. Boutwood stir her tea."

"But why?"

"I don't know. It's nerves, that's what it is. . . . Well, I've got to go through these." She fingered the papers on the dressing-table with her left hand while drying her tears with the right. "He's very wishful for proper accounts, George is. That's right enough. But—well—I think I can

make a shilling go as far as anyone, and choose flesh-meat with anyone, too—that I will say—but these accounts . . . ! George is always wanting to know how much it costs a head a week for this, that and the other. . . . It's all very well for him, but if he had the servants to look after and——”

“ I'm going to keep your accounts for you,” Hilda soothed her.

“ But——”

“ I'm going to keep your accounts for you.” And she thought: “ How exactly like mother I was just then ! ”

It appeared to Hilda that she was making a promise, and shouldering a responsibility, against her will, and perhaps against her common sense. She might keep accounts at the Cedars for a week, a fortnight, a month. But she could not keep accounts there indefinitely. She was sowing complications for herself. Freedom and change and luxury were what she deemed she desired ; not a desk in a boarding-house. And yet something within her compelled her to say in a firm, sure, kindly voice :

“ Now give me all those papers, Miss Gailey.”

And amid indefinite regret and foreboding, she was proud and happy in her rôle of benefactor.

When Hilda at length rose to go to her own room, Sarah Gailey had to move her chair so that she might pass. At the door both hesitated for an instant, and then Hilda with a sudden gesture advanced her lips. It was the first time she and Sarah had ever kissed. The contact with that desiccated skin intensified to an extraordinary degree Hilda's emotional sympathy for the ageing woman. She thought, poignantly : “ Poor old thing ! ”

And when she was on the dark little square landing under the roof, Sarah, holding the lamp, called out in a whisper :

“ Hilda ! ”

“ Well ? ”

“ Did he say anything to you about Brighton ? ”

“ Brighton ? ” She perceived with certainty from Sarah's eager and yet apologetic tone, that the question had been waiting for utterance throughout the evening, and that Sarah had lacked courage for it until the kiss had enheartened her.



And also she perceived that Sarah was suspecting her of being somehow in conspiracy with George Cannon.

"Yes," said Sarah. "He's got into his head that Brighton's the only place for this boarding-house business if it's to be properly done."

"He never said a word to me about Brighton," Hilda whispered positively.

"Oh!"

Hilda descended the stairs, groping. Brighton? What next?

## CHAPTER III

### AT BRIGHTON

#### I

SHE thought vividly, one afternoon about three months later, of that final scrap of conversation. Just as she had sat opposite George Cannon in a second-class compartment, so now she was sitting opposite Sarah Gailey in a second-class compartment. The train, having passed Lewes, was within a few minutes of Brighton. And following behind them, somewhere at the tail of the train, were certain trunks containing all that she possessed and all that Sarah Gailey possessed of personal property—their sole chattels and paraphernalia on earth. George Cannon had willed it and brought it about. He was to receive them on the platform of Brighton Station. She had not seen very much of him in the interval, for he had been continually on the move between Brighton and Turnhill. "In a moment we shall all be together again," she reflected. "This meeting also will happen, as everything else has happened, and a new period will definitely have begun." And she sat and stared at the closed eyes of the desiccated Sarah Gailey, and waited for the instant of arrival apprehensively and as it were incredulously—not with fear, not with pleasure, but with the foreboding of adventure and a curious idea that the instant of arrival never would come.

For thirteen weeks, which had gone very quickly, she had devoted herself to Sarah Gailey, acting as George Cannon's precursor, prophet, and expounder. While the summer cooled into autumn, and the boarding-house season slackened and once more feebly brightened, she had daily conversed with Sarah about George's plans, making them palatable to her, softening the shocks of them, and voluntarily promising not to quit her until the crisis was past. She had had to discourse on the unique advantages of Brighton as a field for

George's enterprise, and on George's common sense and on Sarah's common sense, and the interdependence of the two. When the news came that George had acquired down there a house in going order, she had had to prove that it was not the end of the world that was announced. When the news came that George had re-sold the Cedars to its original occupier, she had had to prove that the transaction did not signify a mysterious but mortal insult to Sarah. When the news came that the Cedars must be vacated before noon on a given Saturday, she had had to begin all her demonstrations afresh, and in addition attempt to persuade Sarah that George was not utterly mad—buying and selling boarding-house tenancies all over the South of England!—and that the exit from the Cedars would not be the ruin of dignity and peace, and the commencement of fatal disasters. In the hour when Sarah Gailey learnt the immutable Saturday of departure, the Cedars, which had been her hell, promised to become, on that very Saturday, a paradise.

On the whole, the three months had constituted a quarter of exceeding difficulty and delicacy. The first month had been rendered memorable by Sarah's astonishing behaviour when Hilda had desired to pay, as before, for her board and lodging. The mere offer of the money had made plain to Sarah—what she then said she had always suspected—that Hilda was her enemy in disguise and (like the rest) bent on humiliating her, and outraging her most sacred feelings. In that encounter, but in no other, Sarah had won. The opportune withdrawal of the Boutwoods from the boarding-house had assisted the establishment of peace. When the Boutwoods left, Miss Gailey seemed to breathe the drawing-room air as though it were ozone of the mountains. But her joy had been quickly dissipated, for to dissipate joy was her chief recreation. A fortnight before the migration to Brighton, Hilda, contemplating all that had to be done, had thought, aghast: "I shall never be able to humour her into doing it all!" Closing of accounts, dismissals, inventories, bills, receipts, packing, decision concerning trains, reception of the former proprietor (especially that!), good-byes, superintending the stowage of luggage on the cab . . . ! George Cannon had not once appeared in the last sensitive weeks,

and he had therein been wise. And all that had to be done had been done—not by Hilda, but by Sarah Gailey the touchy and the competent. Hilda had done little but the humouring.

## II

And there sat Sarah Gailey, deracinated and captive, to prove how influential a person Hilda was! With the eyes shut, Sarah's worn face under her black bonnet had precisely the aspect of a corpse—and the corpse of somebody who had expired under the weight of all the world's woe! Hilda thought: "When she is dead she will look just like that! . . . And one day, sooner or later, she will be dead." Strange that Sarah Gailey, with no malady except her chronic rheumatism, and no material anxiety, and every prospect of security in old age, could not be content, could not at any rate refrain from being miserable! But she could not. She was an exhaustless fount of worry and misery. "I suppose I like her," thought Hilda. "But why do I like her? She isn't agreeable. She isn't amusing. She isn't pretty. She isn't even kind, now. She's only depressing and tedious. As soon as she's fixed up here, I shall go. I shall leave her. I've done enough, and I've had enough. I must attend to my own affairs a bit. After all——" And then Hilda's conscience interrupted: "But can you leave her altogether? Without you, what will happen to her? She's getting older and worse every day. Perhaps in a few years she won't even be competent. Already she isn't perhaps quite, quite as competent as she was." And Hilda said: "Well, of course, I shall have to keep an eye on her; come and see her sometimes—often." And she knew that as long as they both lived she could never be free from a sense of responsibility towards Sarah Gailey. Useless to argue: "It's George Cannon's affair, not mine!" Useless to ask: "*Why* should I feel responsible?" Only after she had laid Sarah Gailey in the tomb would she be free. "And that day, too, will come!" she thought again. "I shall have to go through it, and I shall go through it!"

The poignant romance of existence enveloped her in its beautiful veils. And through these veils she saw, vague and diminished, the far vista of the hours which she had spent with

the Orgreaves. She saw the night of Edwin Clayhanger's visit, and herself and him together in the porch; and she remembered the shock of his words, "There's no virtue in believing." The vision was like that of another and quite separate life. Would she ever go back to it? Janet was her friend, in theory her one intimate friend: she had seen her once in London,—beautiful, agreeable, affectionate, intelligent; all the Orgreaves were lovable. The glance of Edwin Clayhanger, and the sincerity of his smile, had affected her in a manner absolutely unique. . . . But would she ever go back? It seemed to her fantastic, impossible, that she should ever go back. It seemed to her that she was netted by destiny. In any case she knew that she could not, meanwhile, give to that group in Bursley even a part of herself. Hilda could never give a part of herself. Moreover, she was a bad letter-writer. And so, if among themselves the group at Bursley charged her with inconstancy, she must accept the accusation, to which she was inevitably exposed by the very ardour of her temperament.

The putting-on of brakes took her unawares. The train was in Brighton, sliding over the outskirts of the town. Miss Gailey opened her apprehensive eyes. Hilda saw steep streets of houses that sprawled on the hilly mounds of the great town like ladders: reminiscent of certain streets of her native district, yet quite different, a physiognomy utterly foreign to her. This, then, was Brighton. That which had been a postmark became suddenly a reality, shattering her preconceptions of it, and disappointing her she knew not why. She glanced forward, through the window, and saw the cavern of the station. In a few seconds they would have arrived, and her formal mission would be over. She was very agitated and very nervous. George Cannon had promised to meet them. Would he meet them?

The next instant she saw the platform. She saw George Cannon, conspicuous and debonair in a new suit, swinging his ebony stick. The train stopped. He descried them.

"There he is!" she said, bravely pretending to be gay. And she thought: "I could not believe that this moment would come, but it has come."

She had anticipated relief from this moment, but she was



aware of no relief. On the contrary, she felt most uncomfortably apologetic to Sarah Gailey for George Cannon, and to George Cannon for Sarah Gailey. She had the constraint of a sinner. And, by the side of George Cannon on the platform, she was aware of her shabbiness and of her girlish fragility. Nevertheless, she put her shoulders back with a gesture like his own, thinking proudly, and trying to make her eyes speak: "Well, here is Sarah Gailey,—thanks to me!"

As Sarah greeted him, Hilda observed, with some dismay, a curious, very slight stiffening of her demeanour—familiar phenomenon, which denoted that Sarah was in the grip of a secret grievance. "Poor old thing!" she thought ruefully. "I'd imagined she'd forgiven him for bringing her here; but she hasn't."

### III

They drove down from the station in an open carriage, unencumbered by the trunks, which George Cannon had separately disposed of. He sat with his back to the horse, opposite the two women, and talked at intervals about the weather, the prospects of the season, and the town. His familiarity with the town was apparently such that he seemed to be a native of it, and even in some mysterious way to have assisted in its creation and development; so that he took pride in its qualities and accepted responsibility for its defects. When he ceremoniously saluted two women who went by in another carriage, Hilda felt sharply the inferiority of an ignorant stranger in presence of one for whom the place had no secrets.

Her first disappointment changed slowly into expectant and hopeful curiosity. The quaint irregularities of the architecture, and the vastness of the thronged perspectives, made promises to her romantic sense. The town seemed to be endless as London. There were hotels, churches, chapels, libraries, and music-shops on every hand. The more ordinary features of main streets—the marts of jewellery, drapery, and tobacco—had an air of grandiose respectability; while the narrow alleys that curved enigmatically away between the lofty buildings of these fine thoroughfares beckoned darkly to the fancy. The multiplicity of beggars, louts, and organ-

grinders was alone a proof of Brighton's success in the world ; the organ-grinders, often a man and a woman yoked together, were extraordinarily English, genteel, and prosperous as they trudged in their neat, middle-class raiment through the gritty mud of the macadam, stolidly ignoring the menace of high-stepping horses and disdainful glittering wheels. Brighton was evidently a city apart. Nevertheless, Hilda did not as yet understand why George Cannon should have considered it to be the sole field worthy of his enterprise.

Then the carriage rounded into King's Road, and suddenly she saw the incredible frontage of hotels, and *pensions*, and apartments, and she saw the broad and boundless promenade alive with all its processions of pleasure, and she saw the ocean. And everything that she had seen up to that moment fell to the insignificance of a background. She understood.

After a blustering but mild autumn day the scarlet sun was setting calmly between a saffron sky and saffron water ; it flashed upon waves and sails and flags, and upon the puddles in the road, and upon bow-windows and flowered balconies, giving glory to human pride. The carriage, merged in a phalanx of carriages, rolled past innumerable splendid houses, and every house without exception was a hostel and an invitation. Some were higher than any she had ever seen ; and one terrific building, in course of construction, had already far overtopped the highest of its neighbours. She glanced at George Cannon, who, by a carefully casual demeanour, was trying not to take the credit of the entire spectacle ; and she admitted that he was indeed wonderful.

"Of course, Sarah," he said, as the carriage shortly afterwards turned up Preston Street, where the dying wind roughly caught them, "we aren't beginning with anything as big as all that, so you needn't shiver in your shoes. You know what my notion is"—he included Hilda in his address—"my notion is to get some experience first in a smaller house. We must pay for our experience, and my notion is to pay as little as possible. I can tell you there's quite a lot of things that have to be picked up before you've got the hang of a town like this—quite a lot."

Sarah grimly nodded. She had scarcely spoken.

"We're beginning rather well. I've told you all about the Watchett sisters, haven't I? They're an income, a positive income! And then Boutwood and his wife have decided to come—did I tell you?"

"Bou——"

The syllable escaped explosively from Sarah Gailey's mouth, overcoming her stern guard. Instantly, by a tremendous effort, she checked the flow. But the violent shock of the news had convulsed her whole being. The look on her face was changed to desperation. Hilda trembled, and even the splendid and ever-resurgent George Cannon was discountenanced. Not till then had Hilda realized with what intense bitterness the souvenir of the Boutwoods festered in Sarah Gailey's unreasoning heart.

#### IV

"Here we are!" said George Cannon jauntily, as the carriage stopped in front of No. 59, Preston Street. But his jauntiness seemed factitious. The demeanour of all three was diffident and unnatural, for now had arrived the moment when George Cannon had to submit his going-concern to the ordeal of inspection by the women, and especially by Sarah Gailey. There the house stood, a physical fact, forcing George to justify it, and beseeching clemency from the two women. The occasion was critical; therefore everybody had to pretend that it was a perfectly ordinary occasion, well knowing the futility of the pretence. And the inevitable constraint was acutely aggravated by Sarah's silent and terrible reception of the news concerning the Boutwoods.

While George Cannon was paying the driver, Sarah and Hilda hesitated awkwardly on the pavement, their hands occupied with small belongings. They had the sensation of being foreigners to the house; they could not even mount the steps without his protection; scarcely might they in decency examine the frontage of the house. They could not, however, avoid seeing that a workman was fixing a new and splendid brass-plate at the entrance, and that this plate bore the words, "Cannon's Boarding-house." Hilda thought, startled: "At last he is using his own name!"

He turned to them.

"You have a view of the sea from the bow-window of the drawing-room—on the first-floor," he remarked.

Neither Hilda nor Sarah responded.

"And of course from the other bow-window higher up," he added, almost pitifully, in his careful casualness.

Hilda felt sorry for him, and she could not understand why she felt sorry, why it seemed a shame that he should be mysteriously compelled thus to defend the house before it had been attacked.

"Oh yes!" she murmured foolishly, almost fatuously.

The street and the house were disappointing. After the grandeur of the promenade, the street appeared shabby and third-rate; it had the characteristics of a side-street; it was the retreat of those who could not afford anything better, and its base inhabitants walked out on to the promenade and swaggeringly feigned to be the equals of their superiors. The house also was shabby and third-rate—with its poor little glimpse of the sea. Although larger than the Cedars, it was noticeably smaller and meaner than any house on the promenade; and whereas the Cedars was detached, No. 59 was not even semi-detached, but one of a gaunt, tall row of stuccoed and single-fronted dwellings. It looked like a boarding-house (which the Cedars did not), and not all the style of George Cannon's suit and cane and manner, as he mounted the steps, nor the polish of his new brass-plate, could redeem it from the disgrace of being a very ordinary boarding-house.

George Cannon had made a serious mistake in bringing the carriage round by the promenade. True, he had exhibited the glory of Brighton, but he had done so to the detriment of his new enterprise. That No. 59 ought to be regarded as merely an inexpensive field for the acquiring of preliminary experience did not influence the judgment of the women in the slightest degree. For them it was a house that rightly apologized for itself, and whose apologetic air deserved only a condescending tolerance.

The front door stood open for the convenience of the artisan who was screwing at the brass-plate. He moved aside, with the servility that always characterizes the worker in a city of idlers, and the party passed into a long narrow hall, whose

walls were papered to imitate impossible blocks of mustard-coloured marble. The party was now at home.

"Here we are!" said Hilda, with a gaiety that absolutely desolated herself, and in the same instant she remembered that George Cannon had preceded her in saying 'Here we are!' She looked from the awful glumness of Sarah Gailey to the equally awful alacrity of George Cannon, and felt as though she had committed some crime whose nature she could not guess.

A middle-aged maid appeared, like a suspicious scout, at the far end of the hall, beyond the stairs, having opened a door which showed a glimpse of a kitchen.

"That tea ready?" asked George Cannon.

"No, sir," said the maid plumply.

"Well, let it be got ready."

"Yes, sir." The maid vanished, flouncing.

Sarah Gailey, with a heavy sigh, dropped her small belongings on to a narrow bare table that stood against the wall near the foot of the stairs. Daylight was fading.

"Well," said George Cannon, balancing his hat on his cane, "your luggage will be here directly. This is the dining-room." He pushed at a yellow-grained door.

The women followed him into the dining-room, and stared at the dining-room in silence.

"There's a bedroom behind," he said, as they came out, and he displayed the bedroom behind. "That's the kitchen." He pointed to the adjoining door.

"The drawing-room's larger," he said. "It includes the width of the hall."

They climbed the narrow stairs after him wearily. The door of the drawing-room was ajar, and the chatter of thin feminine voices could be heard within. George Cannon gave a soundless warning whisper: "The Watchetts." And Sarah Gailey frowned back the information that she did not wish to meet the Watchetts just then. With every precaution against noise, George Cannon opened two other doors, showing bedrooms. And then, as it were, hypnotized by him, the women climbed another flight of narrow stairs, darkening, and saw more rooms, and then still another flight, and still more rooms, and finally the boasted view of the sea! After all,



Hilda was obliged to admit to herself that the house was more impressive than she had at first supposed. Although single-fronted, it was deep, and there were two bedrooms on the first floor, and four each—two large and two small—on the second and third. Eleven in all, they had seen, of which three were occupied by the Watchetts, and one, temporarily, by George Cannon. The rest were empty; but the season had scarcely begun, and the Boutwoods were coming. George Cannon had said grandly that Hilda must choose her room; she chose the smallest on the top floor. The furniture, if shabby and old-fashioned, was everywhere ample.

They descended, and not a word had been said about Sarah's room.

On the first-floor landing, where indeed the danger was acutest, they were trapped by two of the Watchetts. These elderly ladies shot almost roguishly out of the drawing-room, and by their smiles struck the descending party into immobility.

"Oh! We saw you arrive, Mr. Cannon!" said the elder, shaking her head. "So this is Miss Gailey! Good afternoon, Miss Gailey! So pleased to make your acquaintance!"

There was handshaking. Then it was Hilda's turn.

"We're so sorry our eldest sister isn't here to welcome you to No. 59," said the younger. "She's had to go to London for the day. We're very fond of No. 59. There's no place quite like it, to our minds. And we're quite sure we shall be quite as comfortable with dear Miss Gailey as we were with dear Mrs. Granville, poor thing. It was quite a wrench when we had to say good-bye to her last night. Do come into the drawing-room, please! There's a beautiful view of the sea!"

Sarah Gailey hesitated. A noise of bumping came from the hall below.

"I think that's the luggage," she said. The smile with which she forced herself to respond to the fixed simper of the Watchetts seemed to cause her horrible torment. She motioned nervously to George Cannon, who was nearest the stairs.

"A little later, then! A little later, then!" said both the Watchetts, bowing the party away with the most singular grimaces.

In the hall, a lad, perspiring and breathing quickly, stood behind the trunks.

"Wait a moment," George Cannon said to him, and murmured to Sarah: "This is the basement, here."

The middle-aged maid appeared at the kitchen door with a large loaded tray. "Come along with that tea, Louisa," he added pleasantly.

He went first, Sarah next, and Hilda last, cautiously down a short, dark flight of stone steps beneath the stairs; the servant followed. At the foot a gas-jet burned.

"Those Watchetts might be the landladies!" muttered Sarah, strangely ignoring the propinquity of the maid; and sniffed.

Hilda gave a short, uneasy laugh. She had a desire to laugh loudly and wildly, and by so doing to snap the nervous tension, which seemed to grow tighter and tighter every minute. Her wretchedness had become so exquisite that she could begin to enjoy it, to savour it like a pleasure.

And she thought, with conscious and satisfied grimness:

"So this is Brighton!"

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SEA

#### I

**I**N the evening Hilda, returning from a short solitary walk as far as the West Pier, found Sarah Gailey stooping over her open trunks in the bedroom which had been assigned to her. There were two quite excellent though low-ceiled rooms, of which this was one, in the basement ; the other was to be used as a private parlour by the managers of the house. At night, with the gas lighted and the yellow blind drawn and the loose bundle of strips of silver paper gleaming in the grate, the bedroom seemed very cosy and habitable in its shabbiness ; like the rest of the house it had an ample supply of furniture, and especially of those trifling articles, useful or useless, which collect only by slow degrees, and which are a proof of long humanizing habitation. In that room Sarah Gailey was indeed merely the successor of the regretted Mrs. Granville, the landlady who had mysteriously receded into the unknown before the advent of Sarah and Hilda, but with whom George Cannon must have had many interviews. No doubt the room was an epitome of the character of Mrs. Granville, presumably a fussy and precise celibate, with a place for everything and everything in its place, and an indiscriminating tendency to hoard.

Sarah Gailey was at that stage of unpacking when, trunks being nearly empty and drawers having scarcely begun to fill, bed, table, and chairs are encumbered with confused masses of goods apparently far exceeding the cubical content of the trunks.

“ Can I do anything for you ? ” asked Hilda.

The new landlady raised her watery and dejected eyes. “ If you wouldn’t mind taking every single one of those knick-

knacks off the mantelpiece and putting them away on the top shelf of the cupboard——”

Hilda smiled. “It’s a bit crowded, isn’t it?”

“Crowded!” By her intonation of this one word Sarah Gailey condemned Mrs. Granville’s whole life.

“Can I empty this chair? I shall want something to stand on,” said Hilda.

“Better see if the shelf’s dusty,” Sarah gloomily warned her.

“Well,” murmured Hilda, on the chair, “if my feather doesn’t actually touch the ceiling!” Sarah Gailey made no response to this light-heartedness, and Hilda, with her hands full of vain gewgaws, tried again: “I wonder what Mrs. Granville would say if she saw me! . . . My word, it’s quite hot up here!”

A resonant, very amiable voice came from beyond the door: “Is she there?”

“Who?” demanded Sarah, grievous.

“Miss Lessways.” It was George Cannon.

“Yes.”

“I just want to speak to her if she’s at liberty,” said George Cannon.

Hilda cried from the ceiling: “I’ll come as soon as I’ve——”

“Please go now,” Sarah interrupted in tense accents. Hilda glanced down at her, astonished, and saw in her eyes an almost childish appeal, weak and passionate, which gripped the heart painfully.

She jumped from the chair. Sarah Gailey was now sitting on the bed. Yes, in her worn face of a woman who has definitely passed the climacteric, and in the abandoned pose of those thin arms, there was the look and gesture of a young girl desperately beseeching. Hilda was puzzled and intimidated. She had meant to be jocular, and to insist on staying till the task was finished. But she kept silence and obeyed the supplication, from a motive of prudence.

“I wouldn’t keep you from him for anything,” murmured Sarah Gailey tragically, as Hilda opened the door and left her sitting forlorn among all her skirts and linen.

## II

"I'm here," George Cannon called out from the parlour when he heard the sound of the door. He was looking from the window up at the street; the blind had not been drawn. He turned as Hilda entered.

"You've been out!" he said, observing that she was in street attire.

"What is it?" she asked nervously, fearing that some altercation had already occurred between brother and sister.

"It's about your private affairs—that's all," he said easily, and half-humorously. "If you'll just come in."

"Oh!" she smiled her relief; but nevertheless she was still preoccupied by the image of the woman in the next room.

"They've been dragging on quite long enough," said George Cannon, as he stooped to poke the morsel of fire in the old-fashioned grate, which had a hob on either side. On one of these hobs was a glass of milk. Hilda had learnt that day for the first time that at a certain hour every evening George Cannon drank a glass of warm milk, and that this glass of warm milk was an important factor in his daily comfort. He now took the glass and drank it off. And Hilda had a peculiar sensation of being more intimate with him than she had ever been before.

They sat down to the square table in the middle of the room crowded with oddments of furniture, including a desk which George Cannon had appropriated to his own exclusive use. This desk was open and a portion of its contents were spread abroad on the crimson cloth of the table. Among them Hilda noticed, with her accustomed clerkly eye, two numbers of "The Hotel-Keeper and Boarding-House Review," several sheets of advertisement-scales, and a many-paged document with the heading, "Inventory of Furniture at No. 59, Preston Street"; also a large legal envelope inscribed, "Lessways Estate."

From the latter George Cannon drew forth an engraved and flourished paper, which he silently placed in front of her. It was a receipt signed by the manager of the Brighton branch of the Southern Counties Bank for the sum of three thousand



four hundred and forty-five pounds deposited at call by Miss Hilda Lessways.

"Everything is now settled up," he said. "Here are all the figures," and he handed her another paper showing the whole of the figures for the realization of her real property and of her furniture. "It's in your name, and nobody can touch it but you."

She glanced at the figures vaguely, not attempting to comprehend them. As for the receipt, it fascinated her. The fragile scrap represented her livelihood, her future, her salvation. It alone stood between her and unimagined terrors. And she was surprised to see it, surprised by its assurance that no accident had happened to her possessions during the process of transformation carried out by George Cannon. For, though he had throughout been almost worryingly meticulous in his business formalities and his promptitudes—never had any interest or rent been a day late!—she admitted to herself now that she had been afraid . . . that, in fact, she had not utterly trusted him.

"And what's got to be done with this?" she asked simply, fingering the receipt.

He smiled at her, with a touch of protective and yet sardonic condescension, without saying a word.

And suddenly it struck her that ages had elapsed since her first interview with him in the office over the ironmonger's at Turnhill, and that both of them were extraordinarily changed. (She was reminded of that interview not by his face and look, nor by their relative positions at the table, but by a very faint odour of gas-fumes, for at Turnhill also a gas-jet had been between them.) After an interval of anxiety and depression he had regained exactly the triumphant, self-sure air which was her earliest recollection of him. He was not appreciably older. But for her he was no longer the same man, because she saw him differently; knowing much more of him, she read in his features a thousand minor significances to which before she had been blind. The dominating impression was not now the impression of his masculinity; there was no clearly dominating impression. He had lost, for her, the romantic allurements of the strange and the unknown.

Still, she liked and admired him. And she felt an awe, which was agreeable to her, of his tremendous enterprise and his obstinate volition. That faculty which he possessed of uprooting himself and uprooting others, put her in fear of him. He had willed to be established as a caterer in Brighton—he who but yesterday (as it seemed) was a lawyer in Turnhill—and on this very night, he was established in Brighton, and his sister with him, and she with his sister ! The enormous affair had been accomplished. This thought had been obsessing Hilda all the afternoon and evening.

When she reflected upon the change in herself, the untravelled Hilda of Turnhill appeared a stranger to her, and a simpleton ; no more !

As George Cannon offered no answer to her question, she said :

“ I suppose it will have to be invested, all this ? ”

He nodded.

“ Well, considering it's only been bringing in one per cent. per annum for the last week . . . Of course I needn't have put it on deposit, but I always prefer that way. It's more satisfactory.”

Hilda could hear faintly, through the thin wooden partition, the movements of Sarah Gailey in the next room. And the image of the mournful woman returned to disquiet her. What could be the meaning of that hysteric appeal and glance ? Then she heard the door of the bedroom open violently, and the figure of Sarah Gailey passed like a flash across the doorway of the parlour. And the footsteps of Sarah Gailey pattered up the stone stairs ; and the front door banged ; and the skirts and feet of Sarah Gailey intercepted for an instant the light of the street-lamp that shone on the basement-window of the parlour.

“ Excuse me a minute,” muttered Hilda, frowning. By one of her swift and unreflecting impulses she abandoned George Cannon and her private affairs, and scurried by the area steps into the street.

### III

Bareheaded, and with no jacket or mantle, Sarah Gailey was walking quickly down Preston Street towards the pro-

menade, and Hilda, afraid but courageous, followed her at a distance of thirty or forty yards. Hilda could not decide why she was afraid, nor why it should be necessary, in so simple an undertaking as a walk down Preston Street, to call upon her courage. Assuming even that Sarah Gailey turned round and caught her—what then? The consequences could not be very terrible. But Sarah Gailey did not turn round. She went straight forward, as though on a definite errand in a town with which she was perfectly familiar, and, having arrived at the corner of Preston Street and the promenade, unhesitatingly crossed the muddy roadway of the promenade, and, after a moment's halt, vanished down the steps in the sea-wall to the left-hand of the pier. The pier, a double rope of twinkling lamps, hung magically over the invisible sea, and at the end of it, constant and grave, a red globe burned menacingly in the wind-haunted waste of the night. And Hilda thought, as she hastened with gathering terror across the promenade: "Out there, at the end of the pier, the water is splashing and beating against the piles!"

She stopped at the parapet of the sea-wall, and looked behind her, like a thief. The wrought-iron entrance to the pier was highly illuminated, but except for a man's head and shoulders caged in the ticket-box of the turnstile, there was no life there; the man seemed to be waiting solitary with everlasting patience in the web of wavering flame beneath the huge dark sky. Scores of posters, large and small, showed that Robertson's "School" was being performed in the theatre away over the sea at the extremity of the pier. The promenade, save for one gigantic policeman and a few distant carriages, was apparently deserted, and the line of dimly lighted hotels, stretching vaguely east and west, had an air grim and forlorn at that hour.

Hilda ran down the steps; at the bottom another row of lamps defined the shore, and now she could hear the tide lapping ceaselessly amid the supporting ironwork of the pier. She at once descried the figure of Sarah Gailey in the gloom. The woman was moving towards the faintly white edge of the sea. Hilda started to run after her, first across smooth asphalt, and then over some sails stretched out to dry; and then her feet sank at each step into descending ridges of loose

shingle, and she nearly fell. At length she came to firm sand, and stood still.

Sarah Gailey was now silhouetted against the pale shallows of foam that in ever-renewed curves divided the shore from the sea. After a time, she bent down, rose again, moved towards the water, and drew back. Hilda did not stir. She could not bring herself to approach the lonely figure. She felt that to go and accost Sarah Gailey would be indelicate and inexcusable. She felt as if she were basely spying. She was completely at a loss, and knew not how to act. But presently she discerned that the white foam was circling round Sarah's feet, and that Sarah was standing careless in the midst of it. And at last, timid and shaking with agitation, she ventured nearer and nearer. And Sarah heard her on the sand, and looked behind.

"Miss Gailey!" she appealed in a trembling voice.

Sarah made no response of any kind, and Hilda reached the edge of the foam.

"Please, please don't stand there! You'll catch a dreadful cold, and you've got nothing on your shoulders, either!"

"I want to make a hole in the water," said Sarah miserably. "I wanted to make a hole in the water!"

"Please do come back with me!" Hilda implored; but she spoke mechanically, as though saying something which she was bound to say, but which she did not feel.

The foam capriciously receded, and Hilda, still without any effort of her own will, stepped across the glistening, yielding sand and took Sarah Gailey's arm. There was no resistance.

"I wanted to make a hole in the water," Sarah repeated. "But I made a mistake. I ought to have gone to that groin over there. I knew there was a groin near here, only it's so long since I was here. I'd forgotten just the place."

"But what's the matter?" Hilda asked, leading her away from the sea.

She was not extremely surprised. But she was shocked into a most solemn awe as she pressed the arm of the poor tragic woman, who, but for an accident, might have plunged off the end of the groin into water deep enough for drowning. She did really feel humble before this creature who had deliber-

ately invited death ; she in no way criticized her ; she did not even presume to condescend towards the hasty clumsiness of Sarah Gailey's scheme to die. She was overwhelmed by the woman's utterly unconscious impressiveness, which exceeded that of a criminal reprieved on the scaffold, for the woman had dared an experience that only the fierce and sublime courage of desperation can affront. She had a feeling that she ought to apologize profoundly to Sarah Gailey for all that Sarah must have suffered. And as she heard the ceaseless, cruel play of the water amid the dark jungle of ironwork under the pier, and the soft creeping of the foam-curves behind, and the vague stirrings of the night-wind round about—these phenomena combined mysteriously with the immensity of the dome above and with the baffling strangeness of the town, and with the grandeur of the beaten woman by her side ; and communicated to Hilda a thrill that was divine in its unexampled poignancy.

The great figure of the policeman, suspicious, was descending from the promenade discreetly towards them. To avoid any encounter with him Hilda guided her companion towards the pier, and they sheltered there under the resounding floor of the pier. By the light of one of the lower lamps Hilda could now clearly see Sarah Gailey's face. It showed no sign of terror. It was calm enough in its worn, resigned woe. It had the girlish look again, beneath the marks of age Hilda could distinguish the young girl that Sarah had once been.

"Come home, will you?" she entreated.

Sarah Gailey sighed terribly. "I give it up," she said, with weariness. "I could never do it! I could never do it—now!"

Hilda pulled gently at her unwilling arm. She could not speak. She could not ask her again: "What's the matter?"

"It isn't that the house is too large," Sarah Gailey went on half meditatively ; "though just think of all those stairs, and not a tap on any of the upper floors! No! And it isn't that I'm not ready enough to oblige him. No! I know as well as anybody there's only him between me and starvation. No! It isn't that he doesn't consider me! No! But when



he goes and settles behind my back with those Boutwoods ——” She began to weep. “And when I can hear you and him discussing me in the next room, and plotting against me—it’s—it’s more——” The tears gradually drowned her voice, and she ceased.

“I assure you, you’re quite mistaken,” Hilda burst out, with passionate and indignant persuasiveness. “We never mentioned you. He wanted to talk to me about my money. And if you feel like that over the Boutwoods, I’m certain he’ll tell them they mustn’t come.”

Sarah Gailey shook her head blankly.

“I’m certain he will!” Hilda persisted. “Please——”

The other began to walk away, dragging Hilda with her. The policeman, inspecting them from a distance, coughed and withdrew. They climbed a flight of steps on the far side of the pier, crossed the promenade, and went up Preston Street in silence.

“I should prefer not to be seen going in with you,” said Sarah Gailey suddenly. “It might ——” she freed her arm.

“Go down the area steps,” said Hilda, “and I’ll wait a moment and then go in at the front door.”

Sarah Gailey hurried forward alone.

Hilda, watching her, and observing the wet footmarks which she left on the pavement, was appalled by the sense of her own responsibility as to the future of Sarah Gailey. Till this hour, even at her most conscientious, she had underestimated the seriousness of Sarah Gailey’s case. Everybody had under-estimated the seriousness of Sarah Gailey’s case.

She became aware of some one hurrying cautiously up the street on the other side. It was George Cannon. As soon as Sarah had disappeared within the house he crossed over.

“What’s the matter?” he inquired anxiously.

“Well——”

“She hasn’t been trying to drown herself, has she?”

Hilda nodded, and, speechless, moved towards the house. He turned abruptly away.

The front door of No. 59 was still open. Hilda passed through the silent hall, and went timorously down the steps to the basement. The gas was still burning, and the clothes were still strewn about in Sarah Gailey’s bedroom, just as

though naught had happened. Sarah stood between her two trunks in the middle of the floor.

"Where's George?" she asked, in a harsh, perfectly ordinary voice.

"I don't think he's in the parlour," Hilda prevaricated.

"Promise me you won't tell him!"

"Of course I won't!" said Hilda kindly. "Do get into bed, and let me make you some tea."

Sarah Gailey rushed at her and embraced her.

"I know I'm all wrong! I know it's all my own fault!" she murmured, with plaintive, feeble contrition, crying again. "But you've no idea how I try! If it wasn't for you——"

## IV

That night Hilda, in her small bedroom at the top of the house, was listlessly arranging, at the back of the dressing-table, the few volumes which had clung to her, or to which she had clung, throughout the convulsive disturbances following her mother's death. Among them was one which she did not wish to keep, "The Girl's Week-day Book," and also the whole set of Victor Hugo, which did not belong to her. George Cannon had lent her the latter in instalments, and she had omitted to return it. She was saying to herself that the opportunity to return it had at length arrived, when she heard a low conspiratorial tapping at the door. All her skin crept as, after a second's startled hesitation, she moved to open the door.

George Cannon, holding a candle, stood on the landing. She had not seen him since the brief colloquy between them outside the house. Having satisfied herself that Sarah Gailey was safe, and to a certain extent tranquillized, for the night, she had awaited George Cannon's reappearance a long time in vain, and had then retired upstairs.

"You aren't gone to bed!" he whispered very cautiously. Within a few feet of them was an airless kennel where Louisa, the chambermaid, slept.

"No! I'm just—I stayed up for you I don't know how long."

"Is she all right?"

"Well—she's in bed."

"I wish you'd come to one of these other rooms," he continued to whisper. All the sibilants in his words seemed to detach themselves, hissing, from the rest of the sounds.

She gave a gesture of assent. He tiptoed over the traitorous boards of the landing, and slowly turned the knob of a door in the end wall. The door exploded like the firing of a pistol; frowning, he grimly pushed it open. Hilda followed him, noiselessly creeping. He held the door for her. She entered, and he shut the door on the inside. They were in a small bedroom similar to Hilda's own; but the bed was stripped, the square of carpet rolled, the blind undrawn, and the curtains looped up from the floor. He put the candle on the tiny iron mantelpiece, and sat on the bed, his hands in his pockets.

"You don't mean to say she was wanting to commit suicide?" he said, after a short reflective silence, with his head bent but his eyes raised peeringly to Hilda's.

The crudity of the word 'suicide' affected Hilda painfully.

"If you ask me," said she, standing with her back rubbing against the small wardrobe, "she didn't know quite what she was doing; but there's no doubt that was what she went out for."

"You overtook her? I saw you coming up from the beach."

Hilda related what had happened.

"But had you any notion—before——"

"Me? No! Why?"

"Nothing! Only the way you rushed out like that!"

"Well—it struck me all of a sudden! . . . You've not seen her since you came in?"

He shook his head. "I thought I'd better keep out of the way. I thought I'd better leave it all to you. It's appalling, simply appalling! . . . Just when everything was shaping so well!"

Hilda thought, bewildered: 'Shaping so well'? With her glance she took in the little cheerless bedroom, and herself and George Cannon within it, overwhelmed. In imagination she saw all the other bedrooms, dark, forlorn, and inanimate, waiting through long nights and empty days until some human creature as pathetic as themselves should come and feebly vitalize them into a spurious transient homeliness; and

she saw George Cannon's bedroom—the harsh bedroom of the bachelor who had never had a home ; and the bedrooms of those fearsome mummies, the Watchetts, each bed with its grisly face on the pillow in the dark ; and the kennels of the unclean servants ; and so, descending through the floors, to Sarah Gailey's bedroom in the very earth, and the sleepless form on that bed, beneath the whole ! And the organism of the boarding-house seemed absolutely tragic to her, compact of the stuff of sorrow itself ! And yet George Cannon had said, ' Shaping so well ' !

" What's to be done ? " he inquired plaintively.

" Nothing that I can see ! " she said. She had a tremendous desire to escape from the responsibility thrust on her by the situation ; but she knew that she could never escape from it ; that she was immovably pinned down by it.

" I can't see anything either," said he, quietly responsive, and speaking now in a gentle voice. " Supposing I tell her that she can go, and that I'll make her an allowance ? What could she do, then ? It would be madness for her to live alone any more. She's the very last person who ought to live alone. Moreover, she wouldn't accept the allowance. Well, then, she must stay with me—here. And if she stays here she must work, otherwise she'd never stay—not she ! And she must be the mistress. She wouldn't stand having anyone above her, or even equal with her, that's a certainty ! Besides, she's so good at her job. She hasn't got a great deal of system, so far as I can see, but she can get the work out of the servants without too much fuss, and she's so mighty economical in her catering ! Of course she can't get on the right side of a boarder—but then I *can* ! And that's the whole point ! With me on the spot to *run* the place, she'd be perfect—perfect ! Couldn't wish for anything better ! And now she—— I assure you I'm doing the best I can do for her. I do honestly assure you ! If anybody can suggest to me anything else that I can do—I'll do it like a shot." He threw up his arms.

Hilda was touched by the benevolence of his tone. Nevertheless, it only intensified her helpless perplexity. Sarah Gailey was inexpressibly to be pitied, but George Cannon was

not to be blamed. She had a feeling that for any piteous disaster some one ought to be definitely blamable.

"Do you think she'll settle down?" George Cannon asked, in a new voice.

"Oh yes!" said Hilda. "I think she will. It was just a sort of—attack she had, I think."

"She's not vexed with me?"

Hilda could not find courage to say: "She thinks you and I are plotting against her." And yet she wondered why she should hesitate to say it. After a pause she murmured, as casually as possible: "She doesn't like the Boutwoods coming back."

"I knew you were going to say that!" he frowned.

"If you could manage to stop them——"

"No, no!" He interrupted—nervous, impatient. "It wouldn't do, that wouldn't! It'd never do! A boarding-house can't be run on those lines. It isn't that I care so much as all that about losing a couple of boarders, and I'm not specially keen on the Boutwoods. But it wouldn't do! It's the wrong principle. You haven't got to let customers get on your nerves, so long as they pay and behave respectably. If I gave way, the very first thing Sarah would do would be to find a grievance against some other boarder, and there'd be no end to it. The fact is she wants a grievance, she must have a grievance—whether it's the Boutwoods or somebody else makes no matter! . . . Oh no!" He repeated softly, gently, "Oh no!"

She knew that his argument was unanswerable. She was perfectly aware that she ought to yield to it. Nevertheless, the one impulse of her being in that moment was to fight blindly and irrationally against it. Her instinct said: "I don't care for arguments. The Boutwoods must be stopped from coming. If they aren't stopped, I don't know what I shall do! I can't bear to think of that poor woman meeting them again! I can't bear it." She drew breath sharply. Startling hot tears came into her eyes; and she stepped forward on her left foot.

"Please!" she entreated, "please don't let them come!"

There was a silence. In the agonizing silence she felt acutely her girlishness, her helplessness, her unreason, con-



fronted by his strong and shrewd masculinity. At the bottom of her soul she knew how wrong she was. But she was ready to do anything to save Sarah Gailey from the distress of one particular humiliation. With the whole of her volition she wanted to win.

"Oh well!" he said. "Of course, if you take it so much to heart——"

A peculiar bright glance shot from his eyes—the old glance that at once negligently asserted his power over her, and reassured her against his power. Her being was suffused with gladness and pride. She had won. She had won in defiance of reason. She had appealed, and she had conquered. And she enjoyed his glance. She gloried in it. She blushed. A spasm of exquisite fear shot through her, and she savoured it deliciously. The deep organic sadness of the house presented itself to her in a new light. It was still sadness, but it was beautiful in the background. Her sympathy for Sarah Gailey was as keen as ever, but it had a different quality—an anguish less desolating. And the fact that a joint responsibility for Sarah Gailey's welfare bound herself and George Cannon together in spite of themselves—this fact seemed to her grandiose and romantic, no longer oppressive. To be alone with him in the secrecy of the small upper room seemed to endow her with a splendid worldly importance. And yet all the time a scarce-heard voice was saying clearly within her: "This appeal and this abandonment are unworthy. No matter if this man is kind and sincere and admirable!. This appeal and this abandonment are unworthy!" But she did not care. She ignored the voice.

"I'll tell Sarah in the morning," he said.

"Please don't!" she begged. "You might pretend later on that you've had a letter from the Boutwoods and they can't come. If you tell her to-morrow, she'll guess at once I've been talking to you; and you're not supposed to know anything at all about what happened to-night. She made me promise. But of course she didn't know that you'd found out for yourself, you see!"

George Cannon walked away to the window, and then to the mantelpiece, from which he took up the candle.

“ I’m very much obliged to you,” he said simply, putting a faint emphasis on the last word. She knew that he meant it, without any reserves. But in his urbane tone there was a chill tranquillity that astonished and vaguely disappointed her.

## BOOK IV

### HER FALL

#### CHAPTER I

##### THE GOING CONCERN

###### I

ON a Saturday afternoon of the following August, Hilda was sitting at a book in the basement parlour of "Cannon's Boarding-house" in Preston Street. She heard, through the open window, several pairs of feet mounting wearily to the front door, and then the long remote tinkling of the bell. Within the house there was no responsive sound; but from the porch came a clearing of throats, a muttering, impatient, and yet resigned, and a vague shuffling. After a long pause the bell rang again; and then the gas globe over Hilda's head vibrated for a moment to footsteps in the hall, and the front door was unlatched. She could not catch the precise question; but the reply of Louisa, the chambermaid—haughty, scornful, and negligently pitying—was quite clear:

"Sorry, sir. We're full up. We've had to refuse several this very day. . . . No! I couldn't rightly tell you where. . . . You might try No. 51, 'Homeleigh' as they call it; but we're full up. Good afternoon, sir, 'd afternoon 'm."

The door banged arrogantly. The feet redescended to the pavement, and Hilda, throwing a careless glance at the window, saw two men and a woman pass melancholy down the hot street with their hand-luggage.

And although she condemned and despised the flunkey-souled Louisa, who would have abased herself with sickly smiles and sweet phrases before the applicants, if the house had needed custom; although in her mind she was saying

curtly to the mature Louisa : " It's a good thing Mr. Cannon didn't hear you using that tone to customers, my girl " ; nevertheless, she could not help feeling somewhat as Louisa felt. It was indubitably agreeable to hear a prosperous door closed on dusty and disappointed holiday-makers, and to realize, in her tranquil retreat, that she was part of a very thriving and successful concern.

## II

George Cannon, in a light and elegant summer suit, passed slowly in front of the window, and, looking for Hilda in her accustomed place, saw her and nodded. Surprised by the unusual gesture, she moved uneasily and blushed ; and as she did so, she asked herself resentfully : " Why do I behave like this ? I'm only his clerk, and I shall never be anything else but his clerk ; and yet I do believe I'm getting worse instead of better." George Cannon skipped easily up to the porch ; he had a latchkey, but before he could put it into the keyhole Louisa had flown down the stairs and opened the door to him ; she must have been on the watch from an upper floor. George Cannon would have been well served, whatever his situation in the house, for he was one of those genial bullies who are adored by the menials whom they alternately cajole and terrorize. But his situation in the house was that of a god, and like a god he was attended. He was the very creator of the house ; all its life flowed from him. Without him the organism would have ceased to exist, and everybody in it was quite aware of this. He had fully learnt his business. He had learnt it in the fish market on the beach at seven o'clock in the morning, and in the vegetable market at eight, and in the shops ; he had learnt it in the kitchen and on the stairs while the servants were cleaning ; and he had learnt it at the dinner-table surrounded by his customers. There was nothing that he did not know and, except actual cooking and mending, little that he could not do. He always impressed his customers by the statement that he had slept in every room in the house in order to understand personally its qualities and defects ; and he could and did in fact talk to each boarder about his room with the intimate geographical knowledge of a native. The boarders were further flattered

by the mien and appearance of this practical housekeeper, who did not in the least resemble his kind, but had rather the style of a slightly doggish stockbroker. To be strolling on the King's Road in converse with George Cannon was a matter of pride to boarders male and female. And there was none with whom he could not talk fluently, on any subject from cigars to ozone, according to the needs of the particular case. Nor did he ever seem to be bored by conversations. But sometimes, after benignantly speeding, for instance, one of the Watchetts on her morning constitutional, he would slip down into the basement and ejaculate, 'Cursed hag!' with a calm and natural earnestness, which frightened Hilda, indicating as it did that he must be capable of astounding duplicities.

He came, now, directly to the underground parlour, hat on head and ebony stick in hand. Hilda did not even look up, but self-consciously bent a little lower over her volume. Her relation to George Cannon in the successful enterprise was anomalous, and yet the habit of ten months had in practice defined it. Neither paying board nor receiving wages, she had remained in the house apparently as Sarah Gailey's companion and moral support; she had remained because Sarah Gailey had never been in a condition to be left—and the months had passed very quickly. But her lack of occupation and her knowledge of shorthand, and George Cannon's obvious need of clerical aid, had made it inevitable that they should resume their former rôles of principal and clerk. Hilda worked daily at letters, circularizing, advertisements, and—to a less extent—accounts and bills; the second finger of her right hand had nearly always an agreeable stain of ink at the base of the nail; and she often dreamed about letter-filing. In this prosperous month of August she had, on the whole, less work than usual, for both circularizing and advertisements were stopped.

George Cannon went to the desk in the dark corner between the window and the door, where all business papers were kept, but where neither he nor she actually wrote. When his back was turned she surreptitiously glanced at him without moving her head, and perceived that his hand was only moving idly about among the papers while he stared at the wall.



She thought, half in alarm: "What is the matter now?" Then he came over to the table and hesitated by her shoulder. Still, she would not look up. She could no longer decipher a single word on the page. Her being was somehow monopolized by the consciousness of his nearness.

"Interesting?" he inquired.

She turned her head at last and glanced at him with a friendly smile of affirmation, fingering the leaves of the book nervously. It was Cranswick's "History of Printing." One day, a fortnight earlier, while George Cannon, in company with her, was bargaining for an old London Directory outside a bookseller's shop in East Street, she had seen Cranswick's "History of Printing" (labelled "Published at £1 1s., our price 6s. 6d.") and had opened it curiously. George Cannon, who always kept an eye on her, had said teasingly: "I suppose it's your journalistic past that makes you interested in that?" "I suppose it is," she had answered. Which statement was an untruth, for the sole thought in her mind had been that Edwin Clayhanger was a printer. A strange, idle thought! She had laid the book down. The next day, however, George Cannon had brought it home, saying carelessly: "I bought that book—five and six; the man seemed anxious to do business, and it's a book to have." He had not touched it since.

"Page 473!" he murmured, looking at the number of the page. "If you keep on at this rate, you'll soon know more about printing than young Clayhanger himself!"

She was thunderstruck. Never before had the name of Clayhanger been mentioned between them! Could he, then, penetrate her thoughts? Could he guess that in truth she was reading Cranswick solely because Edwin Clayhanger happened to be a printer? No! It was impossible! The reason of her interest in Cranswick, inexplicable even to herself, was too fantastic to be divined. And yet was not his tone peculiar? Or was it only in her fancy that his tone was peculiar? She blushed scarlet, and her muscles grew rigid.

"I say," George Cannon continued, in a tone that now was unmistakably peculiar, "I want you to come out with me. I want to show you something on the front. Can you come?"

"At once?" she muttered glumly and painfully. What could be the mystery beneath this most singular behaviour?

"Yes."

"Florrie will be arriving at five," said Hilda, after artificially coughing. "I ought to be here then, oughtn't I?"

"Oh!" he cried. "We shall be back long before five."

"Very well," she agreed.

"I'll be ready in three minutes," he said, going gaily towards the door. From the door he gave her a glance. She met it, courageously exposing her troubled features, and nodded.

### III

Hilda went into the bedroom behind the parlour, to get her hat and gloves. A consequence of the success of the boarding-house was that she was temporarily sharing this chamber with Sarah Gailey. She had insisted on making the sacrifice, and she enjoyed the personal discomfort which it involved. When she cautiously lay down on the narrow and lumpy truckle-bed that had been insinuated against an unoccupied wall, and when she turned over restlessly in the night and the rickety ironwork creaked and Sarah Gailey moaned, and when she searched vainly for a particular garment lost among garments that were hung pell-mell on insecure hooks and jutting corners of furniture,—she was proud and glad because her own comfortable room was steadily adding thirty shillings or more per week to the gross receipts of the enterprise. The benefit was in no way hers, and yet she gloated on it, thinking pleurably of George Cannon's great japanned cash-box, which seemed to be an exhaustless store of gold sovereigns and large silver, and of his mysterious—almost furtive—visits to the Bank. Her own capital, invested by George Cannon in railway stock, was bringing in four times as much as she disbursed; and she gloated also on her savings. The more money she amassed, the less willing was she to spend. This nascent avarice amused her, as a new trait in his character always amuses the individual. She said to herself: "I am getting quite a miser," with the assured reservation: "Of course I can stop being a miser whenever I feel like stopping."

Sarah Gailey was lulling herself in a rocking-chair when Hilda entered, and she neither regarded Hilda nor intermitted her see-saw. Her features were drawn into a preoccupied expression of martyrdom, and in fact she constantly suffered physical torture. She had three genuine complaints—rheumatism, sciatica, and neuritis; they were all painful. The latest and worst was the neuritis, which had attacked her in the wrist, producing swollen joints that had to be fomented with hot water. Sarah Gailey's life had indeed latterly developed into a continual fomentation and a continual rocking. She was so taken up with the elemental business of fomenting and of keeping warm, that she had no energy left for other remedial treatments, such as distraction in the open air. She sat for ever shawled, generally with heavy mittens on her arms and wrists, and either fomenting or rocking, in the eternal twilight of the basement bedroom. She eschewed aid—she could manage for herself—and she did not encourage company, apparently preferring to be alone with fate. In her easier hours, one hand resting on another and both hugged close to her breast, rocking to and fro with an astounding monotonous perseverance, she was like a mysterious Indian god in a subterranean temple. Above her, unseen by her, floor beyond floor, the life of the boarding-house functioned in the great holiday month of August.

"I quite forgot about the make-up bed for Florrie," said Sarah Gailey plaintively as she rocked. "Would you have time to see to it? Of course she will have to be with Louisa."

"Very well," said Hilda curtly, and not quite hiding exasperation.

There were three reasons for her exasperation. In the first place, the constant spectacle of Sarah Gailey's pain, and the effect of the pain on Sarah's character, was exasperating—to Hilda as well as to George Cannon. Both well knew that the watery-eyed, fretful spinster was a victim, utterly innocent and utterly helpless, of destiny, and that she merited nothing but patient sympathy; yet often the strain of relationship with Sarah produced in them such a profound feeling of annoyance that they positively resented Sarah's sufferings, and with a sad absence of logic blamed her in her misfortune, just as though she had wilfully brought the maladies upon

herself in order to vex them. Then, further, it was necessary always to minister to Sarah's illusion that Sarah was the mainstay of the house, that she attended to everything and was responsible for everything, and that without her governance the machine would come to a disastrous standstill: the fact being that she had grown feeble and superfluous. Sarah had taught all she knew to two highly intelligent pupils, and had survived her usefulness. She had no right place on earth. But in her morose inefficiency she had developed into an unconscious tyrant—a tyrant whose power lay in the loyalty of her subjects and not at all in her own soul. She was indeed like a deity, immanent, brooding, and unaware of itself! . . . Thus, the question of Florrie's bed had been discussed and settled long before Sarah Gailey had even thought of it; but Hilda might not tell her so. Lastly, this very question of Florrie's bed was exasperating to Hilda. Already Louisa's kennel was inadequate for Louisa, and now another couch had been crowded into it. Hilda was ashamed of the shift; but there was no alternative. Here, for Hilda, was the secret canker of George Cannon's brilliant success. The servants were kindly ill-treated. In the commercial triumph she lost the sense of the tragic forlornness of boarding-house existence, as it had struck her on the day of her arrival. But the image of the Indian god in the basement and of the prone forms of the servants in stifling black cupboards under the roof and under the stairs—these images embittered at intervals the instinctive and reflecting exultation of her moods.

She adjusted her small, close-fitting flowered hat, dropped her parasol across the bed, and began to draw on her cotton gloves.

"Where are you going, dear?" asked Sarah Gailey.

"Out with Mr. Cannon."

"But where?"

"I don't know." In spite of herself there was a certain unnecessary defiance in Hilda's voice.

"You don't know, dear?" Sarah Gailey suddenly ceased rocking, and glanced at Hilda with the mournful expression of acute worry that was so terribly familiar on her features. Although it was notorious that baseless apprehensions were a part of Sarah's disease, nevertheless Hilda could never

succeed in treating any given apprehension as quite baseless. And now Sarah's mere tone begot in Hilda's self-consciousness a vague alarm.

She continued busy with her gloves, silent.

"And on Saturday afternoon too, when everybody's abroad!" Sarah Gailey added gloomily, with her involuntary small movements of the head.

"He asked me if I could go out with him for a minute or two at once," said Hilda, and picked up the parasol with a decisive gesture.

"There's a great deal too much talk about you and George as it is," said Sarah, with an acrid firmness.

"Talk about me and——!" Hilda cried, absolutely astounded.

She had no feeling of guilt, but she knew that she was looking guilty, and this knowledge induced in her the actual sensations of a criminal.

"I'm sure I don't want——" Sarah Gailey began, and was interrupted by a quiet tap at the door.

George Cannon entered.

"Ready, miss?" he demanded, smiling, before he had caught sight of her face.

For the second time that afternoon he saw her scarlet, and now there were tears in her eyes, too.

She hesitated an instant.

"Yes," she answered, with a painful gulp, and moved towards the door.



## CHAPTER II

### THE UNKNOWN ADVENTURE

#### I

WHEN they were fairly out in the street Hilda felt like a mariner who has escaped from a lee shore, but who is beset by the vaguer and even more formidable perils of the open sea. She was in a state of extreme agitation, and much too self-conscious to be properly cognizant of her surroundings : she did not feel the pavement with her feet ; she had no recollection of having passed out of the house. There she was walking along on nothing, by the side of a man who might or might not be George Cannon, amid tall objects that resembled houses ! Her situation was in a high degree painful, but she could not have avoided it. She could not, in Sarah's bedroom, have fallen into sobs, or into a rage, or into the sulks, and told George Cannon that she would not go with him ; she could not have dashed hysterically away and hidden herself on an upper floor, in the manner of a startled fawn. Her spirit was too high for such tricks. On the other hand, she was by no means sufficiently mistress of herself to be able to hide from him her shame. Hence she faced him and followed him, and let him see it. Their long familiarity had made this surrender somewhat easier for her. After all, in the countless daily contacts, they had grown accustomed to minor self-exposures—and Hilda more so than George Cannon ; Hilda was too impatient and impulsive not to tear, at increasingly frequent intervals, the veil of conventional formality.

Her mood now, as she accompanied George Cannon on the unknown adventure, was one of abashed but still fierce resentment. She of course believed Sarah Gailey's statement that there had been ' talk ' about herself and the landlord, and yet it was so utterly monstrous as to be almost incredible.

She was absolutely sure that she had never by her behaviour furnished the slightest excuse for such 'talk.' No eaves-dropper could ever have caught the least word or gesture to justify it. Could a malicious eavesdropper have assisted at the secret operations of her inmost mind, even then he could scarcely have seen aught to justify it. Existence at Brighton had been too strenuous and strange—and, with Sarah Gailey in the house, too full of responsibilities—to favour dalliance. Hilda, examining herself, could not say that she had not once thought of George Cannon as a husband; because just as a young solitary man will imagine himself the spouse of a dozen different girls in a week, so will an unmated girl picture herself united to every eligible and passable sympathetic male that crosses her path. It is the everyday diversion of the fancy. But she could say that she had not once thought seriously of George Cannon as a husband. Why, he was not of her generation! Although she did not know his age, she guessed that he must be nearer forty than thirty. He was of the generation of Sarah Gailey, and Sarah Gailey was the contemporary of her dead mother! And he had never shown for her any sentiment but that of a benevolently teasing kindness. Moreover, she was afraid of him, beyond question. And withal, he patently lacked certain qualities which were to be found in her image of a perfect man. No! She had more often thought of Edwin Clayhanger as a husband. Indeed she had married Edwin Clayhanger several times. The haunting youth would not leave her alone. And she said to herself, hot and indignant: "I shall have to leave Brighton! I can see that! Sarah Gailey's brought it on herself!" Yes, she was actually angry with Sarah Gailey, who, however, had only informed her of a fact which she would have been sorry not to know! And in leaving Brighton, that fancy of hers took her straight to Bursley, to stay with Janet Orgreave in the house next to the new house of the Clayhangers!

Whither was George Cannon leading her? He had not yet said a word in explanation of the errand, nor shown in any way that he had observed her extraordinary condition. He was silent, swinging his stick. She also was silent. She could not have spoken, not even to murmur: "Where are you taking me to?" They went forward as in an enchantment.

## II

They were on the King's Road ; and to the left were the high hotels and houses, stretching east and west under the glare of the sun into invisibility, and to the right was the shore, and the sea so bright that the eye could scarcely rest on it. Both the upper and the lower promenades were crowded with gay people surging in different directions. The dusty roadway was full of carriages, and of the glint of the sun on wheel-spokes and horses' flanks, and of rolling, clear-cut shadows. The shore was bordered with flags and masts and white and brown sails ; and in the white-and-green of billows harmlessly breaking could be seen the yellow bodies of the bathers. A dozen bare-legged men got hold of a yacht under sail with as many passengers on board, and pushed it forcibly right down into the sea, and then up sprang its nose and it heeled over and shot suddenly off, careering on the waves into the offing where other yachts were sliding to and fro between the piers, dominating errant fleets of row-boats. And the piers also were loaded with excited humanity and radiant colour. And all the windows of all the houses and hotels were open, and blowing with curtains and flowers and hats. The whole town was enfevered.

Hilda thought, her heart still beating, but less noisily, " I scarcely ever come here. I don't come here often enough." And she saw Sarah Gailey rocking and sighing and rocking and shaking her head in the mournful twilight of the basement in Preston Street. The contrasts of existence struck her as magnificent, as superb. The very misery and hopelessness of Sarah's isolation seemed romantic, splendid, touchingly beautiful. And she thought, inexplicably : " Why am I here ? Why am I not at home in Turnhill ? Why am I so different from what mother was ? What I am going to be and to do ? This that I now am can't continue for ever." She saw thousands of women with thousands of men. And, quite forgetting that to the view of the multitude she was just as much as any of them with a man (and a rather fine man, too !), she began to pity herself because she was not with a man ! She dreamed, in her extreme excitation, of belonging absolutely to some man. And despite all her pride and independence, she dwelt with pleasure and longing on

the vision of being his, of being at his disposal, of being under his might, of being helpless before him. She thought, desolated: "I am nobody's. And so there is 'talk'!" She scorned herself for being nobody's. To belong utterly to some male seemed to be the one tolerable fate for her in the world. And it was a glorious fate, whether it brought good or evil. Any other was ignobly futile, was despicable. And then she thought, savagely: "And just see my clothes! Why don't I take the trouble to look nice?"

Suddenly George Cannon stopped on the edge of the pavement, and turned towards the houses across the street.

"You see that?" he said, pointing with his stick.

"What?"

"The Chichester."

She saw, in gold letters over the front of a tall corner house: "The Chichester Private Hotel."

"Well?"

"I've taken it—from Christmas. I signed about an hour ago. I just had to tell some one."

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed.

He was beyond question an extraordinary and an impressive man. He had said that, after experimenting in Preston Street, he should take a larger place, and lo! in less than a year, he had fulfilled his word. He had experimented in Preston Street with immense success, and now he was coming out into the King's Road! (Only those who have lived in a side-street can pronounce the fine words 'King's Road' with the proper accent of deference.) And every house in the King's Road, Hilda now newly perceived, was a house of price and distinction. Nothing could be common in the King's Road: the address and the view were incomparably precious. Being established there, George Cannon might, and no doubt would, ultimately acquire one of the largest public hotels; indeed, dominate the promenade! It would be just like him to do so! A year ago he was a solicitor in Turnhill. To-day he was so perfectly and entirely a landlord that no one could ever guess his first career. He was not merely extraordinary: he was astounding. There could not be many of his calibre in the whole world.

"How does it strike you?" he asked, with an eagerness that touched her.

"Oh! It's splendid!" she answered, trying to put more natural enthusiasm into her voice. But the fact was that the Chichester had not yet struck her at all. It was only the idea of being in the King's Road that had struck her—and with such an effect that her attention was happily diverted from her trouble, and her vexatious self-consciousness disappeared. She had from time to time remarked the Chichester, but never with any particularity; it had been for her just an establishment among innumerable others, and not one of the best,—the reverse of imposing. It stood at the angle of King's Road and Ship Street, and a chemist's shop occupied the whole of the frontage, the hotel-entrance being in Ship Street; its architecture was flat and plain, and the place seemed neglected, perhaps unprosperous.

"Twenty bow-windows!" murmured George Cannon, and then smiled at himself, as if ashamed of his own *naïveté*.

And Hilda counted the windows. Yes, there were eight on King's Road and twelve at the side. The building was high, and it was deep, stretching far down Ship Street. In a moment it began to put on, for Hilda, quite special qualities. How high it was! How deep it was! And in what a situation! It possessed mysterious and fine characteristics which set it apart. Strange that hitherto she had been so blind to it! She and George Cannon were divided from the house by the confused and noisy traffic of the roadway, and by the streaming throngs on the opposite pavement. And none of these people riding or driving or walking, and none of the people pushing past them on the pavement behind, guessed that here on the kerb was the future master of the Chichester, an amazing man, and that she, Hilda Lessways, by his side, was the woman to whom he had chosen first to relate his triumph! This unrecognized secrecy in the great animated street was piquant and agreeable to Hilda, a source of pride.

"I suppose you've bought it?" she ventured. She had no notion of his financial resources, but her instinct was to consider **them** infinite.

"No! I've not exactly bought it," he laughed. "Not quite! I've got the lease, from Christmas. How much



d'ye think the rent is ? ” He seemed to challenge her.

“ Oh ! Don't ask me ! ”

“ Five hundred a year,” he said, and raised his chin. “ Five hundred a year ! Ten pounds a week ! Nearly thirty shillings a day ! You've got to pay that before you can even begin to think of your own profits.”

“ But it's enormous ! ” Hilda was staggered. All her mother's houses put together had brought in scarcely a third of the rental of that single house, which was nevertheless only a modest unit in several miles of houses. “ But can you make it pay ? ”

“ I fancy so ! Else I shouldn't have taken it. The present man can't. But then he's paying £550 for one thing, and he's old. And he doesn't know his business. . . . Oh yes ! I think I can see my money back. . . . Wait till Christmas is turned and I make a start ! ”

She knew that the future would justify his self-confidence. How he succeeded she could not define. Why should he succeed where another was failing ? He could not go out and drag boarders by physical force into his private hotel ! Yet he would succeed. In every gesture he was the successful man. She looked timidly up at his eyes under the strong black eyelashes. His glance caught hers. He smiled conqueringly.

“ Haven't said a word to Sarah yet ! ” he almost whispered, so low was his voice ; and he put on a mock-rueful smile. Hilda smiled in response.

“ Shall you keep Preston Street ? ” she asked.

“ Of course ! ” he said with pride—“ I shall run the two, naturally.” He put his shoulders back. “ One will help the other, don't you see ? ”

She thought she saw, and nodded appreciatively. He meant to run two establishments ! At the same moment a young and stylish man drove rather slowly by in a high dog-cart. He nodded carelessly to George Cannon, and then, perceiving that George Cannon was with a lady, raised his hat in haste. George Cannon responded. The young man gazed for an instant hard at Hilda, with a peculiar expression, and passed on. She did not know who he was. Of George Cannon's

relationships in the town she was entirely ignorant, but that he had relationships was always obvious.

She blushed, thinking of what Sarah Gailey had said about 'talk' concerning herself and George Cannon. In the young man's glance there had been something to annoy and shame her.

"Come across and have a look at the place," said George Cannon, suddenly stepping down into the gutter, with a look first in one direction and then in the other for threatening traffic.

"I don't think I'll come now," she replied.

"But why not? Are you in a hurry? You've plenty of time before five o'clock—heaps!"

"I'd prefer not to come," she insisted, in an abashed and diffident voice.

"But what's up?" he demanded, stepping back to the pavement, and glancing directly into her eyes.

She blushed more and more, dropping her eyelids.

"I don't want to be talked about *too* much!" she muttered, mortified. Her inference was unmistakable. The whole of her mind seemed now to be occupied with an enormous grievance which she somehow had against the world in general. Her very soul, too, was bursting with this grievance.

"Talked about? But who——"

"Never mind! I know! I've been told!" she interrupted him.

"Oh! I see!" He was now understanding the cause of her trouble in Sarah Gailey's bedroom.

"Now look here!" he went on, "I've just got to have a few words with you. You come across the road, please." He was imperious.

She raised her glance for a timid moment to his face, and saw to her intense astonishment that he also was blushing. Never before had she seen him blush.

"Come along!" he urged.

She followed him obediently across the dangerous road. He waited for her at the opposite kerb, and then they went up Ship Street. He turned into the entrance of the Chichester, which was grandiose, with a flight of shallow steps, and then a porch with two basket chairs, and then another flight of

shallow steps ending in double doors which were noticeably higher than the street level. She still followed.

"Nobody in here, I expect," said George Cannon, indicating a door on the right, to an old waiter who stood in the dark hall.

"No, sir."

George Cannon opened the door as a master, ushered Hilda into a tiny room furnished with a desk and two chairs, and shut the door.

### III

The small window was of ground-glass and gave no prospect of the outer world, from which it seemed to Hilda that she was as completely cut off as in a prison. She was alone with George Cannon, and beyond the narrow walls which caged them together, and close together, there was nothing! All Brighton, save this room, had ceased to exist. Hilda was now more than ever affrighted, shamed, perturbed, agonized. Yet at the same time she had the desperate calm of the captain of a ship about to founder with all hands. And she saw glimpses, beautiful and compensatory, of the romantic quality of common life. She was in a little office of a perfectly ordinary boarding-house—(she could even detect the stale odours of cooking)—with a realistic man of business, and they were about to discuss a perfectly ordinary piece of scandal; and surely they might be called two common-sense people! And withal, the ordinariness and the midland gumption of the scene were shot through with the bright exotic rays of romance! She thought: "It is painful and humiliating to be caught and fixed as I am. But it is wonderful too!"

"The fact is," said George Cannon, in an easy, reassuring tone, "we never get the chance of a bit of quiet chat. Upon my soul we don't! Now I suppose it's Sarah who's been worrying you?"

"Yes."

"What did she say? . . . You'd better sit down, don't you think?" He swung round the pivoted arm-chair in front of the closed desk and pointed her to it.

"Oh!" Hilda hesitated, and then sank on to the chair without looking at it. "She simply said there was a lot of

talk about you and me. Has she been saying anything to you ? ”

He shook his head, staring down at her. Hilda put her arms on the arms of the chair, and, shirking the man's gaze, stared down at the worn carpet and at his boots thereon. One instinct in her desired that he should move away or that the room should be larger, but another instinct wanted him to remain close, lest the savour of life should lose its sharpness.

“ It passes me how people can say such things ! ” she went on, in a low, thrilled, meditative voice. “ I can't understand it ! ” She was quite sincere in her astonished indignation. Nevertheless, she experienced a positive pride at being brought into a scandal with George Cannon ; she derived from it a certain feeling of importance ; it proved that she was no longer a mere girlish miss.

George Cannon kept silence.

“ I shall leave Brighton,” Hilda continued. “ That I've quite decided ! I don't like leaving your sister, as ill as she is ! But really——” And she thought how prudent she was, and how capable of taking care of herself—she all alone in the world !

“ Where should you go to ? Bursley ? The Orgreaves ? ” George Cannon asked absently and carelessly.

“ I don't know,” said Hilda, with curtness.

He stepped aside, in the direction of the window, and examined curiously the surface of the glass, as though in search of a concealed message which it might contain. In a new and much more animated voice he said to the window :

“ Of course I know it's all my fault ! ”

Hilda glanced up at his back ; he was still not more than three feet away from her.

“ How is it your fault ? ” she asked, after a pause.

He made another pause.

“ The way I look at you,” he said.

These apparently simple words made Hilda tremble, and deprived her of speech. They shifted the conversation to another plane. ‘ The way I look at you ! The way I look at you ! ’ What did he mean ? How did he look at her ?

She could not imagine what he was driving at! Yes, she could! She knew quite well. All the time, while pretending to herself not to understand, she understood. It was staggering, but she perfectly understood. He had looked at her 'like that' on the very first day of their acquaintance, in his office at Turnhill, and again at the house in Lessways Street, and again in the newspaper office, and on other occasions, and again on the night of their arrival at Brighton. But surely not lately! Or did he look at her 'like that' behind her back? Was it possible that people noticed it? . . . Absurd! His explanation of the origin of the gossip did not convince her. She had, however, suddenly lost interest in the origin of the gossip. She was entirely occupied with George Cannon's tone, and his calm, audacious reference to a phenomenon which had hitherto seemed to her to be far beyond the region of words.

She was frightened. She was like some one walking secure in the night, who is stopped by the sound of rushing water and stands with all his senses astrain, afraid to move a step farther, too absorbed and intimidated to be aware of astonishment. The point was not whether or not she had known or guessed the existence of this unseen and formidable river; the point was that she was thrillingly on its brink, in the dark. Every instant she heard its swelling current plainer and plainer. She thought: "Am I lost? How strange that this awful and exquisite thing should happen to just me!" She was quite fatalistic.

He turned his head suddenly and caught her guilty eyes for an instant before she could lower them.

"You don't mean to say you don't know what I mean?" he said.

She still could not speak. Her trouble was acute, her self-consciousness far keener than it had ever been before. She thought: "But it's impossible that this awful and exquisite thing should happen in this fashion!" George Cannon moved a step towards her. She could not see his face, but she knew that he was looking at her with his expression at once tyrannic and benevolent. She could feel, beating upon her, the emanating waves of his personality. And she was as confused as though she had been sitting naked in



front of him. . . . And he had brought all this about by simply putting something into words—by saying: “It’s the way I look at you”!

He went on:

“I can’t help it, you know. . . . The very first minute I ever set eyes on you. . . . Of course I’m thirty-six. But there it is! . . . I’ve never seen anyone like you; and I’ve seen a few! The fact is, Hilda, I do believe you don’t know how fine you are.” He spoke more quickly and with boyish enthusiasm; his voice became wonderfully persuasive. “You are fine, you know! And you’re beautiful! I didn’t think so at first, but you are! You’re being wasted. Why, a woman like you . . .! You’ve no idea. You’re so proud and stiff, when you want to be. . . . I’d trust you with anything. You’re absolutely the only woman I ever met that I’d trust like a man! And that’s a fact. . . . Now, nobody could ever think as much of you as I do. I’m quite certain of it. It couldn’t be done. I *know* you, you see! I understand everything you do, and whatever you do, it’s just fine for me. You couldn’t be as happy with anyone else! You couldn’t! I feel that in my bones. . . . Now—now, I must tell you something——”

The praise, the sympathy, the passion were astounding, marvellous, and delicious to her. Was it conceivable that this experienced and worldly man had been captivated by such a mere girl as herself? She had never guessed it! Or had she always guessed it? An intense pride warmed her blood like a powerful cordial. Life was even grander than she had thought! . . . She drooped into an intoxication. Among all that he had said, he had not said that he was not stronger than she. He had not relinquished his authority. She felt it, sitting almost beneath him in the slippery chair. She knew that she would yield to him. She desired to yield to him. Her mind was full of sensuous images based on the abdication of her will in favour of his.

“Now, look here, Hilda. I want to tell you——”

He perhaps did not intend that she should look up; but she looked up. And she was surprised to see that his face was full of troubled hesitations, showing almost dismay. He made the motion of swallowing. She smiled; and set

her shoulders back—the very gesture that she had learned from him.

“What?” she questioned, in a whisper.

Her brief mood of courage was over. She sank before him again, and waited with bowed head.

Profoundly disturbed, he stood quite still for a few seconds, with shut lips, and then he made another step to approach.

“Your name’s got to be Cannon,” she heard him say.

She thought, still waiting: “If this goes on a moment longer I shall die of anticipation, in bliss.” And when she felt his hand on her shoulder, and the great shadow of him on part of her face, her body seemed to sigh, acquiescent and for the moment assuaged: “This is a miracle, and life is miraculous!” She acknowledged that she had lacked faith in life.

She was now on the river, whirling. But at the same time she was in the small, hot room, and both George Cannon’s hands were on her unresisting shoulders; and then they were round her, and she felt his physical nearness, the texture of his coat and of his skin; she could see in a mist the separate hairs of his tremendous moustache and the colours swimming in his eyes; her nostrils expanded in transient alarm to a faint, exciting masculine odour. She was disconcerted, if not panic-struck, by the violence of his first kiss; but her consternation was delectable to her.

And amid her fright and her joy, and the wonder of her extreme surprise, and the preoccupation of being whirled down the river, she calmly reflected, somewhere in her brain: “The door is not locked. Supposing some one were to come in and see us!” And she reflected also, in an ecstasy of relief: “My life will be quite simple now. I shall have nothing to worry about. And I can help him.” For during a year past she had never ceased to ask herself what she must do to arrange her life; her conscience had never ceased to tell her that she ought not to be content to remain in the narrow ideas of her mother, and that though she preferred marriage she ought to act independently of the hope of it. Throughout her long stay in Preston Street she had continually said: “After this—what? This cannot last for ever. When it comes to an end what am I to do to satisfy my

conscience ? ” And she had thought vaguely of magnificent activities and purposes—she knew not what. . . . The problem existed no more. Her life was arranged. And now, far more sincerely than in the King’s Road twenty minutes earlier, she regarded the career of a spinster with horror and with scorn. At best, she suddenly perceived with blinding clearness, it would have been pitiful—pitiful ! Twenty minutes earlier, in the King’s Road, she had dreamt of belonging absolutely to some man, of being at his disposal, of being under his might, of being helpless before him. And now ! . . . Miracle thrice miraculous ! Miracle unconceived, inconceivable ! . . . No more ‘ talk ’ now ! . . .

She told herself how admirable was the man. She assured herself that he was entirely admirable. She reminded herself that she had always deemed him admirable, that only twenty minutes earlier, in the King’s Road, when there was in her mind no dimmest, wildest notion of the real future, she had genuinely admired him. How clever, how tactful, how indomitable, how conquering, how generous, how kind he was ! How kind to his half-sister ! How forbearing with her ! Indeed, she could not recall his faults. And he was inevitably destined to brilliant success. She would be the wife of a great and a wealthy man. And in her own secret ways she could influence him, and thus be greater than the great.

Love ? It is an absolute fact that the name of ‘ love ’ did not in the first eternal moments even occur to her. And when it did she gave it but little importance. She had to admit that she had not consciously thought of George Cannon with love—at any rate with love as she had imagined love to be. Indeed, her immediate experience would not fit any theory that she could formulate. But with the inexorable realism of her sex she easily dismissed inconvenient names and theories, and accommodated herself to the fact. And the fact was that she overwhelmingly wanted George Cannon, and, as she now recognized, had wanted him ever since she first saw him. The recognition afforded her intense pleasure. She abandoned herself candidly to this luxury of an unknown desire. It was incomparably the most splendid and dangerous experience that she had ever had. She did not reason, and she had no wish to reason. She was set above reason. Happy

to the point of delicious pain, she yet yearned forward to a happiness far more excruciating. She was perfectly aware that her bliss would be torment until George Cannon had married her, until she had wholly surrendered to him.

Yet at intervals a voice said very clearly within her: "All this is wrong. This is base and shameful. This is something to blush for, really!" She did blush. But her blushes were a part of the delight. And the voice was not persistent. She could silence it with scarcely an effort, despite its clarity.

"Kiss me!" George Cannon demanded of her, with eager masterfulness.

The request shocked her for an instant, and the young girl in her was about to revolt. But she kissed him—an act which combined the sweetness of submission with the glory of triumph! She looked at him steadily, confident in herself and in him. She felt that he knew how to love. His emotion filled her with superb pride. She seemed to be saying to him in a doomed rapture: "Do you think I don't know what I am doing? I know! I know!"

The current of the river was tremendous. She foresaw the probability of disaster. She was aware that she had definitely challenged the hazard of fate. But she was not terrified in the dark, swirling night of her destiny. She straightened her shoulders. With all her innocence and ignorance and impulsiveness and weakness, she had behind her the unique and priceless force of her youth. She was young, and she put her trust in life.

## CHAPTER III

### FLORRIE AGAIN

#### I

AS they were walking home along the King's Road, Hilda suddenly stopped in front of a chemist's shop. "I've got something to buy here," she said diffidently, and then added: "I'll follow you."

"And what have you got to buy?" he asked, facing her, with his benevolent, ironical expression.

"Never mind!" she gently laughed. "I shan't be many minutes after you." She pretended to make a mystery. But her sole purpose was to avoid re-entering the house in his company; and she knew that he had divined this. Nevertheless, she found pleasure in the perfectly futile pretence of a mysterious purchase.

She was very self-conscious as they stood there on the dusty footpath amid the promenaders gay and gloomy, chattering and silent, who were taking the sun and the salt breeze. Despite her reason, she had a fear that numbers of people would perceive her to be newly affianced and remark upon the contrast between her girlishness and his maturity. But George Cannon was not in the slightest degree self-conscious. He played the lover with ease and said quite simply and convincingly just the things which she would have expected a lover to say. Indeed, the conversation, as carried on by him, between the moment of betrothal and the arrival at the chemist's shop, was the one phenomenon of the engagement which corresponded with her preconceived ideas concerning such an affair. It convinced her that she really was affianced.

"Well?" he murmured fondly and yet quizzically, as they remained wordless, deliciously hesitating to part. "What are you thinking about?"



She replied with brave candour, appealing to him by a soft glance :

" I was only thinking how queer it is I should be engaged in a room I'd never seen before in my life—going into it like that ! "

He looked at her uncomprehending ; for an instant his features were blank ; then he smiled kindly.

" It's so strange ! " she encouraged him.

" Yes. Isn't it ? " he agreed, with charming, tranquil politeness.

" He doesn't see it ! " she thought, as she watched the play of his face. " He doesn't see how wonderful it is that I should go into a room that was absolutely unknown to me, and then this should happen at once. Why ! I never knew there was such a room ! " She could not define how she was affected by this fact, but she regarded the fact as tremendously romantic, and its effect on her was profound. And George saw in it no significance ! She was disconcerted. She felt a tremor ; it was as though the entire King's Road had quivered for a fraction of a second and then, feigning nonchalance, resumed its moveless solidity.

Inside the chemist's she demanded the first thing she set eyes on—a tooth-brush. All the while she was examining various shapes of tooth-brushes, she had a vision of George raising his hat to take leave of her, and she could see not only the curve of his hand and the whiteness of his cuff, but also the millions of tiny marks and creases on the coarse skin of his face, extraordinarily different from her own smooth, pure, delicate, silky complexion. And she remembered that less than three years ago she had regarded him as of another generation, as indefinitely older and infinitely more experienced than her childish and simple self. This reflection produced in her a consternation which was curiously blissful.

" No, madam," the white-aproned chemist was saying. " It's this size that we usually sell to ladies."

She put on the serious judicial air of an authentic adult woman, and frowned at the chemist.

## II

When, in Preston Street, she was reluctantly approaching the house, she saw a cab, coming downwards in the opposite direction, stop at No. 59.

"That must be Florrie!" she said, half-aloud.

The boarding-house being in need of another servant, young, strong, and reliable, Hilda had suggested that Miss Florence Bagster might be invited to accept the situation. Sarah Gailey had agreed that it would be wise to have a servant from Turnhill; she mistrusted southern servants, and appeared to believe that there was no real honesty south of the Trent. Florence Bagster had accepted the situation with enthusiasm, writing that she longed to be again with her former mistress; she did not write that the mysterious and magnetic name of Brighton called her more loudly than the name of her former mistress. And now Florence was due.

But it was not Florence who emerged from the cab. It was a tall and full-bosomed young lady in a gay multi-coloured costume, and gloves and a sunshade and a striking hat. This young lady stood by the cab expectant and smiling while the cabman pulled a tin trunk off the roof of the vehicle, and then, when the cabman had climbed down and was dragging the trunk after him, she put out an arm and seized one handle of the trunk to help him, which act, so strange on the part of a young lady, made Hilda, coming nearer and nearer, look more carefully. She was astounded as she realized that the unknown young lady was not a young lady after all, but the familiar Florrie at the advanced age of sixteen.

The aged cabman had made no mistake. He left the tin trunk on the pavement and took timid Florrie's money without touching his hat for it. Florrie was laying her sunshade rather forlornly on the top of the tin trunk and preparing to lift the trunk unaided, when Mr. Boutwood, stout and all in black, came gallantly forth from the house to assist her. Sarah Gailey's opposition had not been persistent enough to keep the jovial Mr. Boutwood out of No. 59. Shortly after Christmas his wife had died suddenly, and Mr. Boutwood, with plenty of money and plenty of time on his hands, had found himself desolated. In his desolation he had sought his old acquaintance George Cannon, and the result had some-

how been that bygones had become bygones and a new boarder had increased the prosperity of No. 59. Sarah Gailey could not object. Indeed, she had actually wept for the death of one enemy and the affliction of another. Moreover, she seldom had contact with the boarders now.

The rather peculiar circumstances of Florrie's arrival almost cured Hilda's self-consciousness, and she entered the house, in the wake of the trunk, with a certain forgetful ease. There was Mr. Boutwood, still dallying with Florrie and the trunk, in the narrow hall! The shocking phenomenon of a boarder helping a domestic servant with her luggage had been rendered possible only by a series of accidents. The front door being left open on account of the weather, Mr. Boutwood had had a direct view of the maiden, and the maiden had not been obliged to announce her arrival officially by ringing a bell. Hence the other servants had not had notice. And of the overseers of the house one was imprisoned in the basement and the other two had been out betrothing themselves! In the ordinary way the slightest unusualness in the hall would instantly attract the attention of somebody in authority.

Mr. Boutwood was not immediately aware of Hilda. His attitude towards Florrie was shocking to Hilda in a double sense; it shocked her as an overseer, but it shocked her quite as much as a young woman newly jealous for the pride of all her sex. Florrie was beyond question exceedingly pretty; in particular the chin pouted more deliciously than ever. Her complexion was even finer than Hilda's own. She had a simple, good-natured glance, a quick and extraordinarily seductive smile, and the unique bodily grace of her years. Her costume, though vulgar and very ill-made, was effective at a little distance; her form and movements gave it a fictitious worth. Indeed, she was an amazing blossom to have come off the dunghill of Calder Street. Domestic drudgery had not yet dehumanized nor disfigured her—it is true that her hands were concealed in gloves, and her feet beneath a flowing skirt. Now, Mr. Boutwood's attitude showed very plainly that the girlish charms of Florrie had produced in him a definite and familiar effect. He would have been ready to commit follies for the young woman, and to deny

that she was a drudge or anything but a beautiful creature.

Hilda objected. She objected because Mr. Boutwood was a widower, holding that he had no right to joy, and that he ought to mourn practically for ever in solitude. She would make no allowance for his human instincts, his need of intimate companionship, his enormous unoccupied leisure. She would have condemned him utterly, on the score of his widowhood alone. But she objected far more strongly to his attitude because he was fat and looked somewhat coarse. She counted his obesity to him for a sin. And it was naught to her that he had been a martyr to idleness and wealth, which combination had prematurely aged him. Mr. Boutwood was really younger than George Cannon, and Florence Bagster certainly seemed as old as Hilda. Yet the juxtaposition of the young, slim, and virginal Florrie and the large, earth-worn Mr. Boutwood profoundly offended her.

It was Mr. Boutwood who first discovered that Hilda was in the doorway. He was immediately abashed, and presented the most foolish appearance. Whereupon Hilda added scorn to her disgust. Florrie, however, easily kept her countenance, and with a pert smile took the hand which her former mistress graciously extended. By universal custom a servant retains some of the privileges of humanity for several minutes after entering upon a new servitude. Mr. Boutwood vanished.

"Louisa will help you upstairs with the trunk," said Hilda, when she had made inquiries about the wonderful journey which Florrie had accomplished alone, and about the health of Florrie's aunt and of her family. "Louisa!" she called loudly up the stairs and down into the basement.

### III

She followed the procession of the trunk upstairs, and, Louisa having descended again, showed Florrie into the kennel. This tiny apartment had in it two truckle-beds, and a wash-bowl on a chair, and little else. A very small square trap-window in the low ceiling procured a dusky light in the middle hours of the day. Florence seemed delighted with the room; she might have had to sleep under the stairs.

"Put on your afternoon apron, and then you can go down

and see Miss Gailey," said Hilda, and shut the door upon Florrie in her new home.

When she turned, there was George Cannon on the half-landing beneath the skylight! She knew not how he had come there, nor whether he had entered the house before or after herself.

"I'm glad he isn't fat!" she thought. And it was as though she had thought: "If he were fat everything would be different." Her features did not relax as she went down the five steps to the half-landing where he waited, smiling faintly. She thought: "We must be very serious and circumspect in the house. There must never be the slightest——" But while she was yet on the last step, he firmly put his hands on her ears and, drawing her head towards him, kissed her full on the mouth, and she saw again, through her eyelashes, all the details of his face. She yielded. All her ideas of circumspection melted magically away in an abandoned tenderness of which she was ashamed, but for which she would have unreflectingly made any sacrifice. The embrace was over in an instant. Besides being guiltless of obesity, George Cannon was free from the unpardonable fault of clumsiness. He was audacious, but he was not foolhardy, and he would never be abashed. True, she had seen dismay on his face at the moment of his declaration, but that moment was unique, and his dismay had ineffably flattered her. Now, on the half-landing, she was drenched in bliss. And she felt dissolute; she felt even base. But she did not care. She thought, as it were, startled: "This is love. This must be what love is. I must have been in love without knowing it. And as for a girl always knowing when a man's in love with her, and foreseeing the proposal, and all that sort of thing . . ." Her practical contempt for all that sort of thing could not be stated in words.

"Florrie's just come," she whispered, and by a movement of the head indicated that Florrie was in the kennel.

They went together to the drawing-room on the first floor. It was empty, the entire population of the boarding-houses being still on the seashore. Hilda stood near the door, which she left open, and gave detailed news of Florrie in a tone very matter-of-fact. There was no reference to love, or to the new situation created, or to the vast enterprise of the



Chichester. The topic was Florrie, and somehow it held the field despite efforts to dislodge it.

Then the stairs creaked. Already Florrie was coming down. In a trice she had made herself ready for work. She came down timidly, not daring to look to right nor left, but concentrating her attention on the stairs. She passed along the landing outside the drawing-room door, and Hilda, opening the door a little wider, had a full surreptitious view of her back; and George Cannon, farther within the room, also saw her. They watched her disappear on her way to find the basement and the formidable Sarah Gailey. Hilda was touched by the spectacle of this child disguised as a strapping woman, far removed from her family and her companions and her familiar haunts, and driven or drawn into exile at Brighton, where she would only see the sea once a week, except through windows, and where she would have to work from fourteen to sixteen hours a day for a living, and sleep in a kennel. The prettiness, the pertness, and the naïve contentedness of the child thus realizing an ambition touched her deeply.

"It does seem a shame, doesn't it?" she said.

"What?"

"Bringing her all the way up here, like this! She doesn't know a soul in Brighton. She's bound to be frightfully home-sick——"

"What about you?" George Cannon interrupted politely.

"Doesn't she know you?" He smiled with all his kindness.

"Yes—but——"

Hilda did not finish. It was not worth while. George Cannon had not understood. He did not feel as she felt, and her emotion was incommunicable to him. A tremendous misgiving seized her, and she had a physical feeling of emptiness in the stomach. It passed, swiftly as a hallucination. Just such a misgiving as visits nearly every normal person immediately before or immediately after marriage! She ignored it. She was engaged—that was the paramount fact! She was engaged, and joyously determined to prosecute the grand adventure to the end. The immensity of the risks forced her to accept them.

## IV

That evening Sarah Gailey was in torment from the pain in her wrists. There was nothing to be done. She had had the doctor, and no article of the prescribed treatment had been neglected. With unaccustomed aid from Hilda she had accomplished the business of undressing and getting into bed, and now she sat up in bed, supported by her own pillows and one from Hilda's bed, and nursed her wrists, while Hilda poured drops of a narcotic for her into a glass of water. Apart from the serious local symptoms, her health was fairly good. She could eat, she could talk, she could walk, and her brain was clear. Hilda held the glass for her to drink, for it was prudent to keep her hands as much as possible in repose.

"There!" said Hilda, as if to a young child who had been querulous. "I'm sure you'll sleep now!"

"I don't think I shall," the sufferer whined.

"Oh yes, you will!" Hilda insisted firmly, although she was by no means sure. "Let me take this extra pillow away, and then you can lie down properly." She was thinking reproachfully: "What a pity it is for all of us that the poor thing can't bear her pain with a little less fuss!" It was not Sarah alone who was embittered and fatigued by Sarah's pain.

"Where's George?" asked the invalid, when she was laid down.

"In the parlour. Why?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"By the way," said Hilda, seized by a sudden impulse, which had its origin in Sarah's tone at once martyred and accusing,— "by the way, who is it that's been talking scandal about me and George?"

"Scandal?" Sarah Gailey seemed weakly to protest against the word.

"Because, if you want to know," Hilda continued, "we're engaged to be married!" She reflected, contrite: "This won't help her to sleep!" And then added, in a new, endearing accent, awaiting an outburst of some kind from Sarah: "Of course it's a secret, dear. I'm telling no one but you."

After a moment's silence, Sarah remarked casually, with shut eyes: "It'll be much the best not to tell anyone. And

the shorter the engagement the better ! Don't let anybody in the house know till you're married." She sighed, put her cheek into the pillow, and moved her bound wrists for a few seconds, restlessly. " If you turn the gas down," she finished very wearily, " I dare say I may get off. If only they'd stop that piano upstairs ! "

She had displayed no surprise at the tremendous event, no sentimental interest in it. The fact was that Sarah Gailey's wrists were infinitely more interesting to her than any conceivable project of marriage. Continuous and acute pain had withdrawn her from worldly affairs, making her more than ever like a god.

Hilda was startled. But she was relieved. Now, for the first time, she had the authentic sensation of being engaged. And it appeared to her that she had been engaged for a very long period, and that the engagement was a quite ordinary affair. She was relieved ; yet she was also grievously saddened. She lowered the gas, and in the gloom gazed for a few seconds at the vague, huddled, sheeted, faintly moaning figure on the bed ; the untidy grey hair against the pillow struck her as intolerably pathetic.

" Good night," she said softly.

And the feeble, plaintive voice responded : " Good night."

She went out, leaving the door slightly ajar.

v

In the parlour adjoining, George Cannon was seated at the table. When Hilda saw him and their eyes met, she was comforted ; a wave of tenderness seemed to agitate her. She realized that this man was hers, and the realization was marvellously reassuring. The sound of the piano descended delicately from the drawing-room as from a great distance. From the kitchen came the muffled clatter of earthenware and occasionally a harsh, loud voice ; it was the hour of relaxed discipline in the kitchen, where, amid the final washing-up and much free discussion and banter, Florrie was recommencing her career on a grander basis. Hilda closed the door very quietly. When she had closed it and was shut in with George Cannon her emotion grew intenser.

"I think she'll get off now," she whispered, standing near the door.

"Have you told her?"

Hilda nodded.

"What does she say?"

Hilda raised her eyebrows: "Oh! . . . Well, she says we'd better keep it quiet, and make the engagement as short as possible." She blushed.

"Look here," said George. "Let's go out, eh?"

"But—what will people say?"

"What the devil does it matter what they say? I want you to come out with me."

The whispered oath, and his defiant smile, enchanted her.

"We can go out by the area steps," he continued. "There's two of 'em sitting in the hall, but the front door's shut. Do go and get your hat."

She left the room with an obedient smile. Pushing open Sarah's door very gently, she groped on the hooks behind it for her hat. "It won't matter about gloves—in the dark," she thought. "Besides, I mustn't disturb her." Before drawing to the door she looked again at the bed. There was neither sound nor movement. Probably Sarah Gailey slept. The dim vision of the form on the bed and the blue spark of gas in the corner produced in Hilda a mood of poignant and yet delicious sorrow.

"Why, what's the matter?" George Cannon asked when she had returned to the parlour.

She knew that her eyes were humid with tears. Both her arms were raised above her head as she fixed the hat. This act of fixing the hat in George's presence gave her a new pleasure. She smiled at him.

"Nothing!" she said, whispering mysteriously. "I think she's gone off. I'm so glad. You know she really does suffer dreadfully."

His look was uncomprehending; but she did not care. The anticipation of going out with him was now utterly absorbing her.

He waited with his hand on the gas-tap till she was ready and then he lowered the gas.

"Wait a moment," she whispered at the door, and with a gesture called him back into the room from the flagged passage leading to the area steps.

On the desk was his evening glass of milk, which he drank cold in summer. She offered it to him in the twilight room like an enraptured handmaid. He had forgotten it. The fact that he had forgotten it and she had remembered it yet further increased her strange, mournful, ecstatic bliss.

"Have some," he whispered, when he had drunk.

She finished the glass, trembling. They went forth, climbing the area steps with proper precautions and escaping as thieves escape down the street. For an instant she glimpsed the wide-open windows of the drawing-room and the dining-room, from behind whose illuminated blinds came floating, as it were wistfully, the sound of song and chatter. She thought of Sarah Gailey prone and unconscious in the basement. And she felt the moisture of the milk on her lips. "Am I happy or unhappy?" she questioned herself, and could not reply. She knew only that she was thrillingly, smartingly alive.

At the corner of Preston Street and King's Road a landau waited.

"This is ours," said George casually.

"Ours?"

What a splendid masculine idea! How it proved that he, too, had been absorbed in the adventure! She admired him humbly, like a girl, like a little girl. With the most formal deference he helped her into the carriage.

"Drive towards Shoreham," he commandingly directed the driver, and took his place by her side.

Yes! He was mature. He was a man of the world: He had had every experience. He knew how to love. That such a being was hers, that she without any effort had captured such a being, flattered her to an extreme degree. She was glorious with pride. She leaned back in the carriage negligently, affecting an absolute calm. She armed herself in her virginity. Not George Gannon himself could have guessed that only by a miracle of self-control did she prevent her hand from seeking his beneath the light rug that covered their knees! She intimidated George Cannon in that hour, and the



while her heart burned with shame at the secret violence of her feelings. She thought : " This must be love. This is love ! " And yet her conscience inarticulately accused her of obliquity. But she did not care, and she would not reflect. She thought that she wilfully, perversely, refused to reflect ; but in reality she was quite helpless.

Under the still and feverish night the landau rolled slowly along between the invisible murmuring sea and the lighted façades of Hove. Occasionally other carriages, containing other couples, approached, were plain for a moment, and dissolved away.

" So she thinks the engagement ought to be short ? " said George Cannon.

" Yes,"

" So do I ! " he pronounced with emphasis.

Hilda desired to ask him : " How short ? " But she could not. She could not bring herself to put the question. She was too proud. By a short engagement, did he mean six months, three months, a month ? Dared she hope that he meant . . . a month ? This was a thought buried in the deepest fastness of her soul, a thought that she would have perished in order not to expose ; but it existed.

" I think I should like to go back now," she breathed timidly, before they were beyond Hove. It was not a request to be ignored. The carriage turned. She felt relief. The sensation of being alive had been too acute to be borne, and it was now a little eased. She knew that her destiny was irrevocable, that nothing could prevent her from being George Cannon's. Whether the destiny was evil or good did not paramountly interest her. But she wanted to rush forward into the arms of fate, and to know her fate. She dreamed only of the union.

## BOOK V

### HER DELIVERANCE

#### CHAPTER I

#### LOUISA UNCONTROLLED

##### I

**H**ILDA, after a long railway journey, was bathing her face, arms, and neck at the large double washstand in the large double bedroom on the second floor of No. 59, Preston Street. At the back of the washstand was an unused door which gave into a small bedroom occupied by the youngest Miss Watchett. George Cannon came up quietly behind her. She pretended not to hear him. He put his hands lightly on her wet arms. Smiling with condescending indulgence, half to herself, she still pretended to ignore him, and continued her toilet.

The return from the honeymoon, which she had feared, had accomplished itself quite simply and easily. She had feared the return, because only upon the return was the marriage to be formally acknowledged and published. It had been obviously impossible to announce, during the strenuous summer season, the engagement of the landlord to a young woman who lived under the same roof with him. The consequences of such an indiscretion would have been in various ways embarrassing. Hence not a word was said. Nor were definite plans for the wedding made until George remarked one evening that he would like to be married at Chichester, Chichester being the name of his new private hotel. Which exhibition of sentimentality had both startled and touched Hilda. Chichester, however, had to be renounced, owing to the difficulty of residence. The subject having been thus fairly broached, George had pursued it, and one day somewhat casually stated that he had taken a room in

Lewes and meant to sleep there every night for the term imposed by the law. Less than three weeks later, Hilda had inobtrusively departed from No. 59, the official account being that she was to take a holiday with friends after the fatigues of August and early September. She left the train at Lewes, and there, in the presence of strangers, was married to George Cannon, who had quitted Brighton two days earlier and was supposed to be in London on business. Even Sarah Gailey, though her health had improved, did not assist at the wedding. Sarah, sole depositary of the secret, had to remain in charge of No. 59.

A strange wedding ! Not a single wedding present, except those interchanged by the principals ! Nor had any of the problems raised by the marriage been solved, or attacked. The future of Sarah Gailey, for example ! Was Sarah to go on living with them ? It was inconceivable, and yet the converse was also inconceivable. Sarah had said nothing, and nothing had been said to Sarah. Matters were to settle themselves. It had not even been decided which room Mr. and Mrs. Cannon should inhabit as man and wife. It was almost certain that, in the dead period between the popular summer season and the fashionable autumn season, there would be several bedrooms empty. Hilda, like George, did not want to bother with a lot of tedious details, important or unimportant. The attitude of each was : " Let me get married first, and then I'll see to all that."

Thus had the return been formidable to Hilda. All the way from Ireland she had been saying to herself : " I shall have to go up the steps, and into the house, and be spoken to as Mrs. Cannon ! And then there'll be Sarah . . . ! " But the entry into the house had produced no terror. Everywhere George's adroitness had been wonderful, extraordinarily comforting and reassuring, and nowhere more so than in the vestibule of No. 59. The tone in which he had said to Louisa, " Take Mrs. Cannon's handbag, Louisa," had been a marvel of ease. Louisa had incontestably blenched, for the bizarre Sarah, who conserved in Brighton the inmost spirit of the Five Towns, had thought fit to tell the servants nothing whatever. But the trained veteran in Louisa had instantly recovered, and she had replied " Yes, sir," with a simplicity

which proved her to be the equal of George Cannon. . . . The worst was over for Hilda. And the next moments were made smooth by reason of a great piece of news which, forcing Sarah Gailey to communicate it at once, monopolized attention, and so entirely relieved the bride's self-consciousness.

Florence Bagster, having insolently quarrelled with her mistress, had left her service without notice. Mr. Boutwood had also gone, and the connection between the two departures was only too apparent, not merely to Sarah, but also to the three Miss Watchetts, who had recently arrived. Florence, who could but whisper, had shouted at her mistress. Little, flushing, modest Florrie, who yesterday in the Five Towns was an infant, had compromised herself with a fat widower certainly old enough to be her father. And the widower, the friend of the house, had had so little regard for the feelings of the house that he had not hesitated to flaunt with Florrie in the town. It was known that they were more or less together, and that he stood between Florrie and the world.

## II

"I suppose I'd better write at once to her mother—or perhaps her aunt; her aunt's got more sense," said Hilda, as she dropped the sponge and groped for a towel, her eyes half blinded.

In moving she had escaped from his hands.

"What do you say?" she asked, having heard a vague murmur through the towel.

"I say you can write if you like." George spoke with a careless smile.

Now, facing her, he put his hands on her damp shoulders. She looked up at him over the towel, leaning her head forward, and suspending action. Her nose was about a foot from his. She saw, as she had seen a hundred times, every detail of his large, handsome, and yet time-worn face, every hair of his impressive moustache, all the melting shades of colour in his dark eyes. His charm was coarse and crude, but he was very skilful, and there was something about his experienced, weather-beaten, slightly depraved air which excited her. She liked to feel young and girlish before him; she liked to feel that with him, alone of all men, her modesty

availed nothing. She was beginning to realize her power over him, and the extent of it. It was a power miraculous and mysterious, never claimed by her, and never admitted by him save in glance and gesture. This power lay in the fact that she was indispensable to him. He was not her slave—she might indeed have been considered the human chattel—but he was the slave of his need of her. He loved her. In him she saw what love was; she had seen it more and more clearly ever since the day of their engagement. She was both proud and ashamed of her power. He did not possess a similar power over herself. She was fond of him, perhaps getting fonder; but his domination of her senses was already nearly at an end. She had passed through painful, shattering ecstasies of bliss, hours unforgettable, hours which she knew could never recur. And she was left sated and unsatisfied. So that by virtue of this not yet quite bitter disillusion, she was coming to regard herself as his superior, as being less naïve than he, as being even essentially older than he. And in speaking to him sometimes she would put on a grave and precociously sapient mien, as if to indicate that she had access to sources of wisdom for ever closed to him.

“But don’t you think we *ought* to write?” she frowned.

“Certainly, if you like! It won’t do any good. You don’t suppose her aunt will come down here, do you? And even if she did. . . . There it is, and there you are!”

“Just let me wipe my shoulders, will you?” she said.

He lifted his hands obediently, and as they were damp he rubbed them on the loose corner of the towel.

“Well,” he said, “I must be off, I reckon.”

“Shall you see Mr. Boutwood?”

“I might. . . . I know where to catch him, I fancy.”

She seemed to have a glimpse of her husband’s separate life in the town—masculine haunts and habits of which she knew nothing and would always know nothing. And the large existence of the male made her envious.

“Going to see him now?”

“Well, yes.” George smiled roguishly.

“What shall you say to him?”

“What can I say to him? No business of mine, you



know, except that we've lost a decent servant. But I expect that's Sarah's fault. She's no use whatever with servants now, Sarah isn't."

"I shall never speak to Mr. Boutwood again!" Hilda exclaimed almost passionately.

"Oh, but——"

"His behaviour is simply scandalous. It's really wicked. A man like him!"

George put his lips out deprecatingly. "You may depend she asked for it," he said.

"What?"

"She asked for it," he repeated with convinced firmness, and looked at her steadily.

A flush slowly spread over her face and neck, and she lowered her gaze. In her breast pride and shame were again mingled.

"You keep your hair on, littl'un," said George soothingly, and kissed her. Then he took his hat and stick, which were with a lot of other things on the broad white counterpane, and went off stylishly.

"You don't understand," she threw at him with a delicious side-glance of reproof as he opened the door. She reproached herself for the deceiving coquetry of the glance.

"Don't I?" he returned airily.

He was quite sure that nothing escaped his intelligence. To Hilda, shocked by the coarseness and the obtuseness which evidently characterized his attitude, now as on other occasions, this self-confidence was desolating; it was ominously sinister.

### III

She was alone with her image in the mirror, and the image was precisely the same that she had always seen; she could detect no change in it whatever. She liked the sensation of being alone and at home in this room which before she had only entered as an overseer and which she had never expected to occupy. She savoured the intimacy of the room—the necessities on the washstand, the superb tortoiseshell brushes, bought by George in Dublin, on the dressing-table, the open trunks, George's clothes on a chair, and her own flimsy trifles

on the bed. Through the glass she saw, behind her image, the image of the closed door; and then she turned round to look at the real door and to assure herself that it was closed. Childish! And yet . . .! George had shut the door. She remembered the noise of its shutting. And that noise, in her memory, seemed to have transformed itself into the sound of fate's deep bell. She could hear the clang, sharp, definite. She realized suddenly and with awe that her destiny was fixed hereafter. She had come to the end of her adventures and her vague dreams. For she had always dreamt vaguely of an enlarged liberty, of wide interests, and of original activities—such as no woman to her knowledge had ever had. She had always compared the life of men with the life of women, and admitted and resented the inferiority of the latter. She had had glimpses, once, of the male world; she had made herself the only woman shorthand-writer in the Five Towns, and one of the earliest in England—dizzy thought! But the glimpses had been vain and tantalizing. She had been in the male world, but not of it, as though encircled in a glass ball which neither she nor the males could shatter. She had had money, freedom, and ambition, and somehow, through ignorance or through lack of imagination or opportunity, had been unable to employ them. She had never known what she wanted. The vision had never been clear. And she reflected: "I wonder if my daughter, supposing I had one, would be as different from me as I am from my mother?"

She could recall with intense vividness the moment when she had first really contemplated marriage. It was in the steam-tram after having seen Edwin Clayhanger at the door of Clayhanger's shop. And she could recall the sense of relief with which she had envisaged a union with some man stronger and more experienced than herself. In the relief was a certain secret shame, as though it implied cowardice, a shrinking away from the challenge of life and from the call of a proud instinct. In the steam-tram she had foreseen the time when she would belong utterly to some man, surrendering to him without reserve—the time when she would be a woman. And the thing had come about! Only yesterday she had been a little girl entering George Cannon's

office with timid audacity to consult him. Only yesterday George Cannon had been a strange, formidable man, indefinitely older and infinitely cleverer than she. And now they were man and wife! Now she was his! Now she profoundly knew him, and he was no longer formidable, in spite of his force. She had a recondite dominion over him. She guessed herself to be his superior in certain qualities. He was revealed to her; she felt that she was not revealed to him, and that in spite of her whole-hearted surrender she had not given all because of his blindness to what she offered. She could not completely respect him. But she was his. She was naught apart from him. She was the wife. His existence went on mainly as before; hers was diverted, narrowed—fundamentally altered. Never now could she be enfranchised into the male world!

## IV

She slipped her arms into a new bodice purchased in London on the second day of the marriage. Blushing, she had tried on that bodice in a great shop in Oxford Street; then it was that she had first said 'my husband' in public. All that day she had felt so weak and shy and light and helpless and guilty that she had positively not known what she was doing; she had moved in a phantom world. Only, she had perceived quite steadily and practically that she must give more attention to her clothes. Her old contempt for finery expired in the glory of her new condition. And now, as she settled the elegant bodice on her shoulders, and fastened it, and patted her hair, and picked up the skirt and poised it over her head, she had a stern, preoccupied look, as of one who said: "This that I am doing is important. I must not be hurried in doing it. It is vital that I should look well and that no detail of my appearance should jar." Already she could see herself standing before George when he returned for the meal—the first meal which they would take together in the home. She could feel his eyes on her: she could anticipate her own mood—in which would be mingled pride, misgiving, pleasure, helplessness, abandonment—and the secret condescension towards him of her inmost soul.

All alone in the room she could feel his hands again on

her shoulders: a mysterious excitation. . . . She was a married woman. She had the right to discuss Florrie's case with aloof disdain, if she chose. Her respectability was unassailable. None might penetrate beyond the fact of her marriage. And yet, far within her, she was ashamed. She dimly admitted once more, as on several occasions previous to her marriage, that she had dishonoured an ideal. Her conscience would not chime with the conscience of society. She thought, as she prepared with pleasurable expectancy for her husband: "This is not right. This cannot lead to good. It must lead to evil. I am bound to suffer for it. The whole thing is wrong. I know it, and I have always known it."

Already she was disappointed with her marriage. Amid the fevers of bodily appetite she could clearly distinguish the beginning of lassitude; she no longer saw her husband as a romantic and baffling figure; she had explored and charted his soul, and not all his excellences could atone for his earthliness. She wondered grimly where and under what circumstances he had acquired the adroitness which had charmed and still did charm her. She saw in front of her a vista of days and years in which ennui would probably increase and joy diminish. And she put her shoulders back defiantly, and thought: "Well, here I am anyhow! I wanted him, and I've got him. What I have to go through I shall go through!"

And all the time, floating like vapour over these depths was a sheeny mood of bright expectation and immediate naïve content. And she said gaily that she must write at once to Janet Orgreave to announce the marriage, and that her mother's uncle up in the North must also be informed,

## v

Unusual phenomena made themselves apparent on the top staircase: raised voices which Hilda could hear more and more plainly, even through the shut door. At No. 59, in the off-seasons, nobody ever spoke in a loud tone, particularly on the staircase, except perhaps Florrie when, in conversation with Louisa, she thought she was out of all other hearing. Hilda's voice was very clear and penetrating, but not loud. George Cannon's voice in public places such as the staircase

had an almost caressing softness. The Watchetts cooed like faint doves, thereby expressing the delicate refinement of their virginal natures. The cook's voice was unknown beyond the kitchen. And nobody was more grimly self-controlled in speech than Sarah Gailey and Louisa. These two—and especially Louisa—seemed generally to be restraining with ease tremendous secret forces of bitterness and contempt. And now it was just these two who were noisy, and becoming noisier, to the dismay of a scandalized house. Owing to some accident or negligence the secret forces had got loose.

Hilda shook her head. It was clear that the problem of Sarah Gailey would have to be tackled and settled very soon. The poor woman's physical sufferings had without doubt reacted detrimentally on her temperament and temper. She used to be quite extraordinarily adroit in the directing of servants, though her manner to them never approached geniality. But she had quarrelled with Florrie, and now she was breaking the peace with Louisa! It was preposterous and annoying, and it could not be allowed to continue. Hilda was not seriously alarmed, because she had the most perfect confidence in George's skill to restore order and calm, and to conquer every difficulty of management; and she also put a certain trust in herself; but the menacing and vicious accents of Louisa startled her, and she sympathized with Sarah Gailey, for whom humiliation was assuredly in store—if not immediately at the tongue of Louisa, then later when George would have to hint the truth to her about her decadence.

The dispute on the attic landing appeared to be concerning linen which Louisa had omitted to remove from Florrie's abandoned couch in her kennel.

"I ain't going to touch her sheets, not for nobody!" Louisa proclaimed savagely. And by that single phrase, with its implications, she laid unconsciously bare the sordid baseness of her ageing heart; she exposed by her mere intonation of the word 'sheets' all the foulness of jealousy and thwarted salacity that was usually concealed beneath her tight dress and neat apron, and beneath her prim gestures and deferential tones. Her undisciplined voice rang spinsterishly down the staircase, outraging it, defiling the whole interior.

Hilda as silently as possible unlatched the door of the bed-



room, and stood with ear cocked. Should she issue forth and interfere, or should she remain discreetly where she was? Almost at the same instant she heard the cautious unlatching of the drawing-room door; two of the Watchetts were there listening also. And there came up from the ground floor a faint giggle. The cook, at the kitchen door, was enjoying herself and giggling moral support to her colleague. The giggle proved that the master was out, that the young mistress had not yet established a definite position, and that during recent weeks the old mistress must have been steadily dissipating her own authority. Hilda peered along the landing from her lair, and upstairs and downstairs; she could see nothing but senseless carpets and brass rods and steps and banisters; but she knew that the entire household—she had the sensation that the very house itself—was alert and eavesdropping. There was a hesitating movement on the unseen stairs above, and then Hilda could see Sarah Gailey's felt slippers and the valance of her skirt. And she could hear Sarah's emotional breathing.

"Very well, Louisa, I've done!" Sarah's voice was quieter now. She was trying to control it, and to a limited extent was controlling its volume. It shook in spite of her. She spoke true. She had indeed done. She was at the end of her resources.

"I've been in houses," Louisa conqueringly sneered, "that I have! But I never been in a house afore where one as ought to have been scullery-girl went off with a boarder, and nothing said, and him the friend of the master! And it isn't as if that was all! . . . Sheets, indeed!"

"I've nothing further to say," Sarah returned unnecessarily, and descended the stair. "I shall simply report to Mr. Cannon. We shall see."

"And what's this about *Mrs.* Cannon?" Louisa shouted beside herself.

The peculiarity of her tone arrested Sarah Gailey. Hilda flushed. The Watchetts were listening. The Watchetts had not yet been told of the marriage. The announcement was to be made to them formally, a little later. And now it was Louisa who was making the announcement, brutally, coarsely. The outrage of the episode was a hundredfold intensified;

it grew into an inconceivable ghastly horror. Hilda's self-respect seemed to have a physical body, and Louisa to be hacking at it with a jagged knife.

"Mr. Cannon has brought his wife home," said Sarah Gailey shortly, with a dignity and courage that increased as her distance from the appalling, the incredible Louisa. Hilda could see her pale face now. The eyebrows and chin were lifted in scorn of the vile menial, but the poor head was trembling.

"And what about his other wife?"

"Louisa!"—Sarah Gailey looked again up the stairs—"I know you're in a temper and not responsible for what you say. But you'd better be careful." She spoke with elaborate haughty negligence.

"Had I?" Louisa shrilled. "What I say is, What about his other wife? What about the old woman he married in Devonshire? Why, God bless me, Florrie was full of it—couldn't talk about anything else in bed of a nights! Didn't you know the old woman'd been inquiring for her beautiful 'usband down your way?" She laughed loudly. "Turnhill—what's-its-name? . . . And all of you lying low, and then making out all of a sudden as he's brought his wife home! A nice house! And I've been in a few, too!"

Hilda could feel her heart beating with terrific force against her bodice, but she was conscious of no other sensation. She heard a loud snort of shattering contempt from Louisa; and then a strange and terrific silence fell on the stairs. There was no sound even of a movement. The Watchetts did not stir; the cook did not stir; Sarah Gailey did not stir; Louisa's fury was sated. The empty landing lay, as it were, expectant at Hilda's door.

Then Sarah Gailey perceived Hilda half hidden in the doorway, and staggeringly rushed towards her. In an instant they were both in the bedroom and the door shut.

"When will George be back so that he can put her out of the house?" Sarah whispered frantically.

"Soon, I expect," said Hilda, and felt intensely self-conscious.

They said no more. And it was as though the house were besieged and invested, and only in that room were they safe, and even in that room only for a few moments.

## CHAPTER II

### SOME SECRET HISTORY

#### I

WITHOUT a word, Sarah had left the bedroom. Hilda waited, sitting on the bed, for George to come back from his haunts in the town. She both intensely desired and intensely feared his return. A phrase or two of an angry and vicious servant had almost destroyed her faith in her husband. It seemed very strange, even to her, that this should be so; and she wondered whether she had ever had a real faith in him, whether—passion apart—her feeling for him had ever been aught but admiration of his impressive adroitness. Was it possible that he had another wife alive? No, it was not possible! That is to say, it was not possible that such a catastrophe should have happened to just her, to Hilda Lessways, sitting there on the bed with her hands pressing on the rough surface of the damask counterpane. And yet—how could Louisa or Florrie have invented the story? . . . Wicked, shocking, incredible, that Florrie, with her soft voice and timid, affectionate manner, should have been chattering in secret so scandalously during all these weeks! She remembered the look on Florrie's blushing face when the child had received the letter on the morning of their departure from the house in Lessways Street. Even then the attractively innocent and capable Florrie must have had her naughty secrets! . . . An odious world! And Hilda, married, had seriously thought that she knew all about the world! She had to admit, bewildered: "I'm only a girl after all, and a very simple one." She compared her own heart in its simplicity with that of Louisa. Louisa horrified and frightened her. . . . Louisa and Florrie were mischievous liars. Florrie had seized some fragment of silly gossip—Turnhill was notorious for its silly gossip—

and the two of them had embroidered it in the nastiness of their souls. She laughed shortly, disdainfully, to wither up silly gossip. . . . Preposterous !

And yet—when George had shown her the licence, in the name of Cannon, and she had ventured to say apologetically and caressingly : “ I always understood your real name was Canonges,”—how queerly he had looked as he answered : “ I changed it long ago—legally ! ” Yes, and she had persuaded herself that the queerness of his look was only in her fancy ! But it was not only in her fancy. Suspicions, sinister trifling souvenirs, crowded into her mind. Had she not always doubted him ? Had she not always said to herself that she was doing wrong in her marriage and that she would thereby suffer ? Had she not abandoned the pursuit of religious truth in favour of light enjoyments ? . . . Foolish of course, old-fashioned of course, to put two and two together in this way ! But she could not refrain.

“ I am ruined ! ” she decided, in awe.

And the next instant she was saying : “ How absurd of me to be like this, merely because Louisa . . . ! ”

She thought she heard a noise below. Her heart leapt again into violent activity. Trembling, she crept to the door, and gently unlatched it. No slightest sound in the whole house ! Dusk was coming on swiftly. Then she could hear all the noises, accentuated beyond custom, of Louisa setting tea in the dining-room for the Watchetts, and then the tea-bell rang. Despite her fury, apparent in the noises, Louisa had not found courage to neglect the sacred boarders. She made a defiant fuss, but she had to yield, intimidated, to the force of habit and tradition. The Watchetts descended the staircase from the drawing-room, practising as usual elaborate small-talk among themselves. They had heard every infamous word of Louisa's tirade ; which had engendered in them a truly dreadful and still delicious emotion ; but they descended the staircase in good order, discussing the project for a new pier. . . . They reached the dining-room and shut the door on themselves.

Silence again ! Louisa ought now to have set the tea in the basement parlour. But Louisa did not. Louisa was hidden in the kitchen, doubtless talking fourteen to the

dozen with the cook. She had done all she meant to do. She knew that she would be compelled to leave at once, and not another stroke would she do of any kind! The master and the mistresses must manage as best they could. Louisa was already wondering where she would sleep that night, for she was alone on earth and owned one small trunk and a Post Office Savings Bank book. . . . All this trouble on account of Florrie's sheets!

Sarah Gailey was in her bedroom, and did not dare to come out of it even to accuse Louisa of neglecting the basement tea. And Hilda continued to stand for ages at the bedroom door, while the dusk grew deeper and deeper. At last the front door opened, and George's step was in the hall. Hilda recognized it with a thrill of terror, turning pale. George ran down into the basement and stumbled. "Hello!" she heard him call out. "What about tea? Where are you all? Sarah!" No answer, no sound in response! He ran up the basement steps. Would he call in at the dining-room, or would he come to the bedroom in search of her? He did not stop at the dining-room. Hilda wanted to shut the bedroom door, but dared not because she could not do it noiselessly. Now he was on the first floor! She rushed to the bed, and sat on it, as she had been sitting previously, and waited in the most painful and irrational agony. She was astonished at the darkness of the room. Turning her head, she saw only a whitish blur instead of a face in the dressing-table mirror.

## II

"What's up?" he demanded, bursting somewhat urgently into the bedroom with his hat on. "What price the husband coming home to his tea? No tea! No light! I nearly broke my neck down the basement stairs."

He put his hands against her elbows and kissed her, rather clumsily, owing to the gloom, between her nose and her mouth. She did not shrink back, but accepted the embrace quite insensibly. The contact of his moustache and of his lips, and his slight, pleasant masculine odour, produced no effect on her whatever.

"Why are you sitting here? Look here, I've signed the



transfer of those Continental shares, and paid the cheque ! So it's domino, now ! ”

Between the engagement and the marriage there had been an opportunity of purchasing three thousand pounds' worth of preference shares in the Brighton Hotel Continental Limited, which hotel was the latest and largest in the King's Road, a vast affair of eight storeys, and bathrooms on every floor. The chance of such an investment had fascinated George. It helped his dreams and pointed to the time when he would be manager and part proprietor of a palace like the Continental. Hilda being very willing, he had sold her railway shares and purchased the hotel shares, and he knew that he had done a good thing. Now he possessed an interest in three different establishments, he who had scarcely been in Brighton a year. The rapid progress, he felt, was characteristic of him.

Hilda kept silence, for the sole reason that she could think of no words to say. As for the matter of the investment, it appeared to her to be inexpressibly uninteresting. From under the lashes of lowered eyes she saw his form shadowily in front of her.

“ You don't mean to say Sarah's been making herself disagreeable already ! ” he said. And his tone was affectionate and diplomatic, yet faintly ironical. He had perceived that something unusual had occurred, perhaps something serious, and he was anxious to soothe and to justify his wife. Hilda perfectly understood his mood and intention, and she was reassured.

“ Hasn't Sarah told you ? ” she asked in a harsh, uncontrolled voice, though she knew that he had not seen Sarah.

“ No ; where is she ? ” he inquired patiently.

“ It's Louisa,” Hilda went on, with the sick fright of a child compelled by intimidation to affront a danger. Her mouth was very dry.

“ Oh ! ”

“ She lost her temper and made a fearful scene with Sarah, on the stairs ; she said the most awful things.”

George laughed low, and lightly. He guessed Louisa's gift for foul insolence and invective.

"For instance?" George encouraged. He was divining from Hilda's singular tone that tact would be needed.

"Well, she said you'd got a wife living in Devonshire."

There was a pause.

"And who'd told her that?"

"Florrie."

"Indeed!" muttered George. Hilda could not decide whether his voice was natural or forced.

Then he stepped across to the door, and opened it.

"What are you going to do to her?" Hilda questioned, as it were despairingly.

He left the room and banged the door.

"It's not true," Hilda was beginning to say to herself, but she seemed to derive no pleasure from the dawning hope of George's innocence.

Then George came into the room again, hesitated, and shut the door carefully.

"I suppose it's no good shilly-shallying about," he said, in such a tone as he might have used had he been vexed and disgusted with Hilda. "I have got a wife living, and she's in Devonshire! I expect she's been inquiring in Turnhill if I'm still in the land of the living. Probably wants to get married again herself."

Hilda glanced at his form, and suddenly it was the form of a stranger, but a stranger who had loved her. And she thought: "Why did I let this stranger love me?" It was scarce believable that she had ever seriously regarded him as a husband. And she found that tears were running down her cheeks; and she felt all her girlishness and fragility. "Didn't I always know," she asked herself, with weak resignation, "that it was unreal? What am I to do now?" The catastrophe had indeed happened to her, and she could not deal with it! She did not even feel tragic. She did not feel particularly resentful against George. She had read of such catastrophes in the newspapers, but the reality of experience nonplussed her. "I ought to do something," she reflected. "But what?"

"What's the use of me saying I'm sorry?" he asked savagely. "I acted for the best. The chances were ten thousand to one against me being spotted. But there you

are ! You never know your luck." He spoke meditatively, in a rather hoarse, indistinct voice. " All owing to Florrie, of course ! When it was suggested we should have that girl, I knew there was a danger. But I pooh-poohed it ! I said nothing could possibly happen. . . . And just look at it now ! . . . I wanted to cut myself clear of the Five Towns, absolutely—absolutely ! And then like a damnation fool I let Florrie come here ! If she hadn't come, that woman might have inquired about me in Turnhill till all was blue, without you hearing about her ! But there it is ! " He snapped his fingers. " It's my fault for being found out ! That's the only thing I'm guilty of. . . . And look at it ! Look at it ! "

Hilda could tell from the movements of the vague form in the corner by the door, and by the quality of his voice, that George Cannon was in a state of extreme emotion. She had never known him half so moved. His emotion excited her and flattered her. She thought how wonderful it was that she, the shaking little girl who yesterday had run off with fourpence to buy a meal at a tripe-shop, should be the cause of this emotion in such a man. She thought : " My life is marvellous." She was dizzied by the conception of the capacity of her own body and soul for experience. No factors save her own body and soul and his had been necessary to the bringing about of the situation. It was essential only that the man and the woman should be together, and their companionship would produce miracles of experience ! She ceased crying. Astounding that she had never, in George's eyes, suspected his past ! It was as if he had swiftly opened a concealed door in the house of their passion and disclosed a vista of which she had not dreamed.

" But surely that must have been a long time ago ! " she said in an ordinary tone.

" Considering that I was twenty-two—yes ! "

" Why did you leave her ? "

" Why did I leave her ? Because I had to ! I'd gone as a clerk in a solicitor's office in Torquay, and she was a client. She went mad about me. I'm only telling you. She was a spinster. Had one of those big houses high up on the hill behind the town ! " He stopped ; and then his voice began

to come again out of the deep shadow in the corner. "She wanted me, and she got me. And she didn't care who knew! The wedding was in the 'Torquay Directory.' I told her I'd got no relations, and she was jolly glad."

"But how old was she? Young?"

George sneered. "She'd never see thirty-six again, the day she was married. Good-looking. Well-dressed. Very stylish and all that! Carried me off my feet. Of course there was the money. . . . I may as well out with it all while I'm about it! She made me an absolute present of four thousand pounds. Insisted on doing it. I never asked. Of course I know I married for money. It happens to youths sometimes just as it does to girls. It may be disgusting, but not more disgusting for one than for the other. Besides, I didn't realize it was a sale and purchase, at the time! . . . Oh! And it lasted about ten days. I couldn't stand it, so I told her so and chucked it. She began an action for restitution of conjugal rights, but she soon tired of that. She wouldn't have her four thousand back. Simply wouldn't! She was a terror, but I'll say that for her. Well, I kept it. Four thousand pounds is a lot of brass. That's how I started business in Turnhill, if you want to know!" He spoke defiantly. "You may depend I never let on in the Five Towns about my beautiful marriage. . . . That's the tale. You've got to remember I was twenty-two!"

She thought of Edwin Clayhanger and Charlie Orgreave as being about twenty-two, and tried in her imagination to endow the mature George Cannon with their youth and their simplicity and their freshness. She was saddened and overawed; not wrathful, not obsessed by a sense of injury.

Then she heard a sob in the corner, and then another. The moment was terrible for her. She could only distinguish in the room the blur of a man's shape against the light-coloured wall-paper, and the whiteness of the counterpane, and the dark square of the window broken by the black silhouette of the mirror. She slipped off the bed, and going in the direction of the dressing-table groped for a match-box and lit the gas. Dazzled by the glare of the gas, she turned to look at the corner where stood George Cannon.

## III

The whole aspect of the room was now altered. The window was blacker than anything else ; light shone on the carved frame of the mirror and on the vessels of the wash-stand ; the trunks each threw a sharply-defined shadow ; the bed was half in the shadow of its mahogany foot, and half a glittering white ; all the array of requisites on the dressing-table lay stark under the close scrutiny of the gas ; and high above the bed, partly on the wall and partly on the ceiling, was a bright oblong reflection from the upturned mirror.

Hilda turned to George with a straightening of the shoulders, as if to say : " It is I who have the courage to light the gas and face this situation ! " But when she saw him her challenging pride seemed to die slowly away. Though there was no sign of a tear on his features, and though it was difficult to believe that it was he who had just sobbed, nevertheless his figure was dismayingly tragic. Every feature was distorted by agitation. He was absorbed in himself, shameless and careless of appearances. He was no more concerned about appearances and manly shame than a sufferer dying in torment. He was beyond all that—in truth a new George Cannon ! He left the corner, and sat down on the bed in the hollow made by Hilda, and stared at the wall, his hands in the pockets of his gay suit. His gestures as he moved, and his posture as he sat, made their unconscious appeal to her in their abandonment. He was caught ; he was vanquished ; he was despairing ; but he instinctively, and without any wish to do so, kept his dignity. He was still, in his complete overthrow, the mature man of the world, the man to whom it was impossible to be ridiculous.

Hilda in a curious way grew proud of him. With an extraordinary inconsequence she dwelt upon the fact that, always grand—even as a caterer, he had caused to be printed at the foot of the menu forms which he had instituted, the words : " A second helping of all or any of the above dishes will willingly be served if so desired. " And in the general havoc of the shock she began to be proud also of herself, because it was the mysterious power of her individuality that had originated the disaster. The sense of their intimate with-



drawn seclusion in the room, disordered and littered by arrival, utterly alone save for the living flame of the gas, the sense of the tragedy, and of the responsibility for it, and especially her responsibility, the sense of an imposed burden to be grimly borne and of an unknown destiny to be worked out, the sense of pity, the sense of youth and force,—these things gradually exalted her and ennobled her desolation.

“Why did you keep it from me?” she asked, in a very clear and precise tone, not aggrieved, but fatalistic and melancholy.

“Keep what from you?” At length he met her eyes, darkly.

“All this about your being married.”

“Why did I keep it from you?” he repeated harshly, and then his tone changed from defiance to a softened regret: “I’ll tell you why I kept it from you! Because I knew if I told you I should have no chance with a girl like you. I knew it’d be all up—if I so much as breathed a hint of it! I don’t suppose you’ve the slightest idea how stand-offish you are!”

“Me stand-offish!” she protested.

“Look here!” he said persuasively. “Supposing I’d told you I wanted you, and then that I’d got a wife living—what would you have said?”

“I don’t know.”

“No! But *I* know! And suppose I’d told you I’d got a wife living and then told you I wanted you—what then? No, Hilda! Nobody could fool about with you!”

She was flattered, but she thought secretly: “He could have won me on any terms he liked! . . . I wonder whether he *could* have won me on any terms! . . . That first night in this house, when we were in the front attic—suppose he’d told me then—I wonder! What should I have said?” But the severity of her countenance was a perfect mask for such weak and uncertain ideas, and confirmed him deeply in his estimate of her.

He continued:

“Now that first night in this house, upstairs!” He jerked his head towards the ceiling. She blushed, not from any shame, but because his thought had surprised hers. “I was

as near as dammit to letting out the whole thing and chancing it with you. But I didn't—I saw it'd be no use. And that's not the only time either!"

She stood silent by the dressing-table, calmly looking at him, and she asked herself, eagerly curious: "When were the other times?"

"Of course it's all my fault!" he said.

"What is?"

"This! . . . All my fault! I don't want to excuse myself. I've nothing to say for myself."

In her mind she secretly interrupted him: "Yes, you have. You couldn't do without me—isn't that enough?"

"I'm ashamed!" he said, without reserve, abasing himself. "I'm utterly ashamed. I'd give anything to be able to undo it."

She was startled and offended. She had not expected that he would kiss the dust. She hated to see him thus. She thought: "It isn't all your fault. It's just as much mine as yours. But even if I was ashamed I'd never confess it. Never would I grovel! And never would I want to undo anything! After all, you took the chances. You did what you thought best. Why be ashamed when things go wrong? You wouldn't have been ashamed if things had gone right."

"Of course," he said, after a pause, "I'm completely done for!"

He spoke so solemnly, and with such intense conviction, that she was awed and appalled. She felt as one who, having alone escaped destruction in an earthquake, stands afar off and contemplates the silent, corpse-strewn ruin of a vast city.

And the thought ran through her mind like a squirrel through a tree: "How *could* he refuse her four thousand pounds? And if she wouldn't have it back,—well, what was he to do? She must be a horrible woman!"

#### IV

Both of them heard a heavy step pass up the staircase. It was Louisa's; she paused to strike a match and light the gas on the landing; and went on. But Sarah Gailey had

given no sign, and the Watchetts were still shut in the dining-room. All these middle-aged women were preoccupied by the affair of George Cannon. All of them guessed now that Louisa's charge was not unfounded—otherwise, why the mysterious and interminable interview between George Cannon and Hilda in the bedroom? Hilda pictured them all. And she thought: "But it is *I* who am in the bedroom with him! It is *I* who am living through it and facing it out! They are all far older than me, but they are outsiders. They don't know what life is!"

George rose, picked up a portmanteau, and threw it open on the bed.

"And what is to be done?" Hilda asked, trembling.

He turned and looked at her.

"I suppose I mustn't stay here?"

She shook her head, with lips pressed tight.

His voice was thick and obscure when he asked: "You won't come with me?"

She shook her head again. She could not have spoken. She was in acute torture.

"Well," he said, "I suppose I can count on you not to give me up to the police?"

"The police?" she exclaimed. "Why?"

"Well, you know,—it's a three years' job—at least. Ever heard the word 'bigamy'?" His voice was slightly ironical.

"Oh dear!" she breathed, already disconcerted. It had positively not occurred to her to consider the legal aspect of George's conduct.

"But what can you do?" she asked, with the innocent, ignorant helplessness of a girl.

"I can disappear," he replied. "That's all I can do! I don't see myself in prison. I went over Stafford Prison once. The Governor showed several of us over. And I don't see myself in prison."

He began to cast things into the portmanteau, and as he did so he proceeded, without a single glance at Hilda:

"You'll be all right for money and so on. But I should advise you to leave here and not to come back any sooner than you can help. That's the best thing you can do. And be Hilda Lessways again! . . . Sarah will have to manage

this place as best she can. Fortunately, her health's improved. She can make it pay very well if she likes. It's a handsome living for her. My deposit on the Chichester and so on will have to be forfeited."

"And you?" she murmured.

His back was towards her. He turned his head, looked at her enigmatically for an instant, and resumed his packing.

She desired to help him with the packing; she desired to show him some tenderness; her heart was cleft in two with pity; but she could not move; some harshness of pride or vanity prevented her from moving.

When he had carelessly finished the portmanteau, he strode to the door, opened it wide, and called out in a loud, firm voice:

"Louisà!"

A reply came weakly from the top floor:

"Yes, sir."

"I want you." He had a short way with Louisa.

After a brief delay, she came to the bedroom door.

"Run down to the King's Road and get me a cab," he said to her at the door, as it were confidentially.

"Yes, sir." The woman was like a Christian slave.

"Here! Take the portmanteau down with you to the front door." He gave her the portmanteau.

"Yes, sir."

She disappeared; and then there was the noise of the front door opening.

George picked up his hat and abruptly left the room. Hilda moved to and fro nervously, stiff with having stood still so long. She wondered how he, and how she, would comport themselves in the ordeal of adieu. In a few moments a cab drove up—Louisa had probably encountered it on the way. Hilda waited, tense. Then she heard the cab driving off again. She rushed aghast to the window. She saw the roof of the disappearing cab, and the unwieldy portmanteau on it. . . . He had gone! He had gone without saying good-bye! That was his device for simplifying the situation. It was drastic, but it was magnificent. He had gone out, of the house and out of her life. As she gazed at the dim, swaying roof of the cab, magically the roof was taken off,

and she could see the ravaged and stricken figure within, sitting grimly in the dark between the wheels that rolled him away from her. The vision was intolerable. She moved aside and wept passionately. How could he help doing all he had done? She had possessed him—the memories of his embrace told her how utterly! All that he had said was true; and this being so, who could blame his conduct? He had only risked and lost.

Sarah Gailey suddenly appeared in the room, and shut the door like a conspirator.

“Then——?” she began, terror-struck.

And Hilda nodded, ceasing to cry.

“Oh! My poor dear!” Sarah Gailey moaned feebly, her head bobbing with its unconscious nervous movements. The sight of her worn, saddened features sharpened Hilda’s appreciation of her own girlishness and inexperience.

But despite the shock, despite her extreme misery, despite the anguish and fear in her heart and the immense difficulty of the new situation into which she was thus violently thrust, Hilda was not without consolation. She felt none of the shame conventionally proper to a girl deceived. On the contrary, deep within herself, she knew that the catastrophe was a deliverance. She knew that fate had favoured her by absolving her from the consequences of a tragic weakness and error. These thoughts inflamed and rendered more beautiful the apprehensive pity for the real victim—now affronted by a new danger, the menace of the law.



## BOOK VI

### HER PUNISHMENT

#### CHAPTER I

##### EVENING AT BLEAKRIDGE

###### I

**W**HEN Hilda's cab turned, perilously swaying through the gate into the dark garden of the Orgreaves, Hilda saw another cab already at the open house door, and in the lighted porch stood figures distinguishable as Janet and Alicia, all enwrapped for a journey, and Martha holding more wraps. The long façade of the house was black, save for one window on the first floor, which threw a faint radiance on the leafless branches of elms, and thus intensified the upper mysteries of the nocturnal garden. The arrival of the second cab caused excitement in the porch; and Hilda, leaning out of the window into the November mist, shook with apprehension, as her vehicle came to a halt behind the other one. She was now to meet friends for the first time after her secret and unhappy adventure. She feared that Janet, by some magic insight of affection, would read at once in her face the whole history of the past year.

Janet had written to her, giving and asking for news, and urging a visit, on the very day after the scene in which George Cannon admitted his turpitude. Had the letter been sent a day or two sooner, reaching Hilda on her honeymoon, she would certainly have replied to it with the tremendous news of her marriage and, her marriage having been made public in the Five Towns, her shame also would necessarily be public. But chance had saved her from this humiliation. Nobody in the district was aware of the mar-

riage. By a characteristic instinct, she had been determined not to announce it in any way until the honeymoon was over. In answer to Janet, she had written very briefly, as was usual with her, and said that she would come to Lane End House as soon as she could. "Shall I tell her, or shan't I?" she had cogitated, and the decision had been for postponement. But she strongly desired, nevertheless, to pay the visit. She had had more than enough of Preston Street and of Brighton, and longed to leave at any price.

And at length, one dull morning, after George Cannon had sailed for America, and all affairs were somehow arranged or had arranged themselves, and Sarah Gailey was better and the autumn season smoothly running with new servants, she had suddenly said to Sarah: "I have to go to Bursley to-day, for a few days." And she had gone, upon the impulse, without having previously warned Janet. Changing at Knype, she had got into the wrong train, and had found herself at Shawport, at the far, lower end of Bursley, instead of up at Bleakridge, close by the Orgreaves! And there was, of course, no cab for her. But a cabman who had brought a fare to the station, and was driving his young woman back, had offered in a friendly way to take Hilda too. And she had sat in the cab with the young woman, who was a paintress at Peel's great manufactory at Shawport, and suffered from a weak chest; and they had talked about the potters' strike which was then upheaving the district, and the cab had overtaken a procession of thinly-clad potters, wending in the bitter mist to a mass meeting at Hanbridge; and Hilda had been thereby much impressed and angered against all employers. And the young woman had left the cab, half-way up Trafalgar Road, with a delicious pink-and-white smile of adieu. And Hilda had thought how different all this was from Brighton, and how much better and more homely and understandable. And now she was in the garden of the Orgreaves.

Martha came peeping, to discover the explanation of this singular concourse of cabs in the garden, and she cried joyously:

"Oh, Miss Janet, it's Miss Hilda—Miss Lessways, I mean!"

Alicia shrieked. The first cab drew forward to make room

for Hilda's, and Hilda stepped down into the glare of the porch, and was plainly beheld by all three girls.

"Will they notice anything?" she asked herself, self-conscious, almost trembling, as she thought of the terrific changes that had passed in her since her previous visit.

But nobody noticed anything. Nobody observed that this was not the same Hilda. Even in the intimacy of the affectionate kiss, for which she lifted her veil, Janet seemed to have no suspicion whatever.

"We were just off to Hillport," said Janet. "How splendid of you to come like this!"

"Don't let's go to Hillport!" said Alicia.

Janet hesitated, pulling down her veil.

"Of course you must go!" Hilda said positively.

"I'm afraid we shall have to go," said Janet, with reluctance. "You see, it's the Marrions—Edie's cousins—and Edie will be there!"

"Who's Edie?"

"Why! Tom's fiancée! Surely I told you!"

"Yes," said Hilda; "only I didn't just remember the name. How nice!"

(She thought: "No sooner do I get here than I talk like they do! Fancy me saying, 'How nice'!")

"Oh, it's all Edie nowadays!" said Alicia lightly. "We have to be frightfully particular, or else Tom would cut our heads off. That's why we're going in a cab! We should have walked,—shouldn't we, Janet?—only it would never do for us to *walk* to the Marrions' at night! 'The Misses Lessways' carriage!' " she mimicked, and finicked about on her toes.

Janet was precisely the same as ever, but the pig-tailed Alicia had developed. Her childishness was now shot through with gestures and tones of the young girl. She flushed and paled continuously, and was acutely self-conscious and somewhat vain, but not offensively vain.

"I say, Jan," she exclaimed, "why shouldn't Hilda come with us?"

"To the Marrions'? Oh no, thanks!" said Hilda.

"But do, Hilda! I'm sure they'd be delighted!" Janet urged. "I never thought of it."

Though she was flattered and, indeed, a little startled by the extraordinary seriousness of Janet's insistence, Hilda shook her head.

"Where's Tom?" she inquired, to change the subject.

"Oh!" Alicia burst out again. "He's gone off *hours* ago to escort his lady-love from Hanbridge to Hillport."

"You wait till you're engaged, Alicia!" Janet suggested. But Janet's eyes, too, twinkled the admission that Tom was just then providing much innocent amusement to the family.

"You'll sleep in my room to-night, anyhow, dear," said Janet, when Martha and Hilda's cabman had brought a trunk into the hall, and Hilda had paid the cabman far more than his fare because he was such a friendly young cabman and because he possessed a pulmonary sweetheart. "Come along, dear! . . . Alicia, ask Swindells to wait a minute or two."

"Swindells," Alicia shouted to the original cabman, "just wait a jiff!"

"Yes, miss." The original cabman, being old and accustomed to evening-party work in the Five Towns, knew the length of a jiff, and got down from his seat to exercise both arms and legs. With sardonic pleasure he watched the young cabman cut a black streak in the sodden lawn with his near front wheel as he clumsily turned to leave. Then Martha banged the front door, and another servant appeared in the hall to help the trunk on its way upstairs.

"No! I shall never be able to tell them!" thought Hilda, following the trunk.

Alicia had scampered on in front of the trunk, to inform her parents of the arrival. Mrs. Orgreave, Hilda learnt, was laid up with an attack of asthma, and Osmond Orgreave was working in their bedroom.

## II

Hilda stood in front of the fire in Janet's bedroom, and Janet was unlocking her trunk.

"Why! What a pretty bodice!" said Janet, opening the trunk. She stood up, and held forth the bodice to inspect it; and beneath Janet's cloak Hilda could see the splendour of her evening dress. "Where did you get it?"

"In London," Hilda was about to answer, but she took thought. "Oh! Brighton." It was a lie.

She had a longing to say:

"No, not Brighton! What am I thinking of? I got it in London on my honeymoon!"

What a unique sensation that one word would have caused! But she could not find courage to utter it.

Alicia came importantly in.

"Mother's love, and you are to go into her room as soon as you're ready. Martha will bring up a tray for you, and you'll eat there by the fire. It's all arranged."

"And what about father's love?" Hilda demanded, with a sprightliness that astonished herself. And she thought: "Why are these people so fond of me? They don't even ask how it was I didn't write to tell them I was coming. They just accept me and welcome me without questions. . . . No! I can never tell them! It simply couldn't be told, here! If they find out, so much the worse!"

"You must ask him!" Alicia answered, blushing.

"All right, Alicia. We'll be ready in a minute or two," said Janet, in a peculiar voice.

It was a gentle command to Alicia to leave her elders alone to their adult confidences. And unwilling Alicia had to obey.

But there were no confidences. The talk, as it were, shivered on the brink of a confidence, but never plunged.

"Does she guess?" Hilda reflected.

The conversation so halted that at length Janet was driven to the banality of saying:

"I'm so sorry we have to go out!"

And Hilda protested with equal banality, and added:

"I suppose you're going out a lot just now?"

"Oh no!" said Janet. "We go out less and less, and we get quieter and quieter. I mean *us*. The boys are always out, you know." She seemed saddened. "I did think Edwin Clayhanger would come in sometimes, now they're living next door——"

"They're in their new house, then!" said Hilda with casualness.

"Oh, long ago! And I'm sure it's ages since he was here. I like Maggie—his sister."



Hilda knelt to her trunk.

"Did he ever inquire after me?" she demanded, with an air of archness, but hiding her face.

"As a matter of fact he *did*—once," said Janet, imitating Hilda's manner.

"Well, that's something," said Hilda.

There was a sharp knock at the door.

"Hot water, miss!" cried the voice of Martha.

The next instant Martha was arranging the ewer and the can and some clean towels on the washstand. Her face was full of joy in the unexpected arrival. She was as excited as if Hilda had been her own friend instead of Janet's.

"Well, dear, shall you be all right now?" said Janet. "Perhaps I ought to be going. You may depend on it I shall get back as early as ever I can."

The two girls kissed, with even more freedom than in the hall. It seemed astonishing to Hilda, as her face was close to Janet's, that Janet did not exclaim: "Something has happened to you. What is it? You are not as you used to be! You are not like me!" She felt herself an impostor.

"Why should I tell?" Hilda reflected. "What end will it serve? It's nobody's business but mine. *He* is gone. He'll never come back. Everything's over. . . . And if it does get about, well, they'll only praise me for my discretion. They can't do anything else."

Still, she longed timorously to confide in Janet. And when Janet had departed she breathed relief because the danger of confiding in Janet was withdrawn for the moment.

### III

Later, as the invalid had ordained, Hilda, having eaten, sat by the fire in the large, quiet bedroom of Mr. and Mrs. Orgreave. The latter was enjoying a period of ease, and lay, with head raised very high on pillows, in her own half of the broad bed. The quilt extended over her without a crease in its expanse; the sheet was turned down with precision, making a level white border to the quilt; and Mrs. Orgreave did not stir; not one of her grey locks stirred; she spoke occasionally in a low voice. On the night-table stood a Godfrey's Chloride of Ammonia Inhaler, with its glass

cylinder and triple arrangement of tubes. There was only this, and the dark lips and pale cheeks of the patient, to remind the beholder that not long since the bed had been a scene of agony. Mr. Orgreave, in bright carpet slippers, and elegant wristbands blossoming out of the sleeves of his black house-jacket, stood bending above a huge board that was laid horizontally on trestles to the left of the fireplace. This board was covered by a wide length of bluish transparent paper which at intervals he pulled towards him, making billows of paper at his feet and gradually lessening a roll of it that lay on the floor beyond the table. A specially arranged gas-bracket with a green shade which threw a powerful light on the paper showed that Osmond Orgreave's habit was to work in that spot of an evening.

"Astonishing I have to do this myself, isn't it?" he observed, stooping to roll up the accumulated length of paper about his feet.

"What is it?" Hilda asked.

"It's a full-sized detail drawing. Simple! . . . But do you suppose I could trust either of my ingenious sons to get the curves of the mouldings right?"

"You'll never be able to trust them unless you begin to trust them," said Mrs. Orgreave sagely from the bed.

"Ha!" ejaculated Osmond Orgreave satirically. This remark was one of his most effective counters to argument.

"The fact is he thoroughly enjoys it, doesn't he, Mrs. Orgreave?" said Hilda.

"You're quite right, my dear," said Mrs. Orgreave.

"Ah!" from Mr. Orgreave.

He sketched with a pencil and rubbed out, vigorously. Then his eye caught Hilda's, and they both smiled, very content. "They'd look nice if I took to drink instead of to work, for a change!" he murmured, pausing to caress his handsome hair.

There was a sharp knock at the door, and into this room also the watchful Martha entered.

"Here's the 'Signal,' sir. The boy's only just brought it."

"Give it to Miss Hilda," said Mr. Orgreave, without glancing up.

"Shall I take the tray away, 'm?" Martha inquired, looking towards the bed, the supreme centre of domestic order and authority.

"Perhaps Miss Hilda hasn't finished?"

"Oh yes, I have, thanks."

Martha rearranged the vessels and cutlery upon the tray, with quick, expert movements of the wrists. Her gaze was carefully fixed on the tray. Endowed though she was with rare privileges, as a faithful retainer, she would have been shocked and shamed had her gaze, improperly wandering, encountered the gaze of the master or the guest. Then she picked up the tray, and, pushing the small table into its accustomed place with a deft twist of the foot, she sailed erect and prim out of the room, and the door primly clicked on her neat girded waist and flying white ribbons.

"And what am I to do with this 'Signal'?" Hilda asked, fingering the white, damp paper.

"I should like you to read us about the strike," said Mrs. Orgreave. "It's a dreadful thing."

"I should think it was!" Hilda agreed fervently. "Oh! Do you know, on the way from Shawport, I saw a procession of the men, and anything more terrible——"

"It's the children I think of!" said Mrs. Orgreave softly.

"Pity the men don't!" Mr. Orgreave murmured without raising his head.

"Don't what?" Hilda asked defiantly.

"Think of the children."

Bridling, but silent, Hilda opened the sheet, and searched round and about its columns with the embarrassed bewilderment of one unaccustomed to the perusal of newspapers.

"Look on page three—first column," said Mr. Orgreave.

"That's all about racing," said Hilda.

"Oh dear, dear!" from the bed.

"Well, second column."

"The Potters' Strike. The men's leaders," she read the headlines. "There isn't much of it."

"How beautifully clearly you read!" said Mrs. Orgreave, with mild enthusiasm, when Hilda had read the meagre half-column.

"Do I?" Hilda flushed.

"Is that all there is about it?"

"Yes. They don't seem to think it's very important that half the people are starving!" Hilda sneered.

"Whose fault is it if they do starve?" Osmond Orgreave glanced at her with lowered head.

"I think it's a shame!" she exclaimed.

"Do you know that the men broke the last award, not so very long since?" said Osmond Orgreave. "What can you do with such people?"

"Broke the last award?" She was checked.

"Broke the last award! Wouldn't stick by their own agreement, their own words. I'll just tell you. A wise young woman like you oughtn't to be carried away by the sight of a procession on a cold night."

He smiled; and she smiled, but awkwardly.

And then he told her something of the case for the employers.

"How hard you are on the men!" she protested, when he had done.

"Not at all! Not at all!" He stretched himself and came round his trestles to poke the fire. "You should hear Mr. Clayhanger on the men, if you want to know what hard is."

"Mr. Clayhanger? You mean old Mr. Clayhanger?"

"Yes."

"But he isn't a manufacturer."

"No. But he's an employer of labour."

Hilda rose uneasily from her chair, and walked towards the distant, shadowed dressing-table.

"I should like to go over a printing-works," she said abruptly.

"Very easy," said Mr. Orgreave, resuming his work with a great expulsion of breath.

Hilda thought: "Why did I say that?" And, to cover her constraint, she cried out: "Oh, what a lovely book!"

A small book, bound in full purple calf, lay half hidden in a nest of fine tissue paper on the dressing-table.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Mrs. Orgreave. "Tom brought it in to show me, before he went this afternoon. It's a birthday present for Edie. He's had it specially bound. I must

write myself, and ask Edie to come over and meet you. I'm sure you'd like her. She's a dear girl. I think Tom's very fortunate."

"No, you don't," Osmond Orgreave contradicted her, with a great rustling of paper. "You think Edie's very fortunate."

Hilda looked round, and caught the architect's smile.

"I think they're both fortunate," said Mrs. Orgreave simply. She had almost no sense of humour. "I'm sure she's a real good girl, and clever too."

"Clever enough to get on the right side of her future mother-in-law, anyway!" growled Mr. Orgreave.

"Anyone might think Osmond didn't like the girl," said Mrs. Orgreave, "from the way he talks. And yet he adores her! And it's no use him pretending he doesn't!"

"I only adore you!" said Osmond.

"You needn't try to turn it off!" his wife murmured, beaming on Hilda.

Tears came strangely into Hilda's eyes, and she turned again to the dressing-table. And through a blur, she saw all the objects ranged in a long row on the white cloth that covered the rosewood; and she thought: "All this is beautiful." And she saw the pale blinds drawn down behind the dressing-table, and the valance at the top, and the draped curtains; and herself darkly in the glass. And she could feel the vista of the large, calm, comfortable room behind her, and could hear the coals falling together in the grate, and the rustling of the architect's paper, and Mrs. Orgreave's slight cough. And, in her mind, she could see all the other rooms in the spacious house, and the dim, misted garden beyond. She thought: "All this house is beautiful. It is the most beautiful thing I have ever known, or ever shall know. I'm happy here!" And then her imagination followed each of the children. She imagined Marian, the eldest, and her babies, in London; and Charlie, also in London, practising medicine; and Tom and Janet and Alicia at the party at Hillport; and Jimmie and Johnnie seeing life at Hanbridge; while the parents remained in tranquillity in their bedroom. All these visions were beautiful; even the vision of Jimmie and Johnnie flourishing billiard-cues and



glasses and pipes in the smoky atmosphere of a club—even this was beautiful; it was as simply touching as the other visions. . . . And she was at home with the parents, and so extremely intimate with them that she could nearly conceive herself a genuine member of the house. She was in bliss. Her immediate past dropped away from her like an illusion, and she became almost the old Hilda; she was almost born again into innocence. Only the tragic figure of George Cannon hung vague in the far distance of memory, and the sight thereof constricted her heart. Utterly her passion for him had expired: she was exquisitely sad for him; she felt towards him kindly and guiltily, as one feels towards an old error. . . . And, withal, the spell of the home of the Orgreaves took away his reality.

She was fingering the book. Its title-page ran: "The English Poems of Richard Crashaw." Now she had never even heard of Richard Crashaw, and she wondered who he might be. Turning the pages, she read:

All thy old woes shall now smile on thee,  
And thy pains sit bright upon thee,  
All thy sorrows here shall shine,  
All thy sufferings be divine:  
Tears shall take comfort, and turn gems,  
And wrongs repent to diadems.

And she read again, as though the words had been too lovely to be real, and she must assure herself of them:

Tears shall take comfort, and turn gems,  
And wrongs repent to diadems.

She turned back to the beginning of the poem, and read the title of it: "A Hymn, to the name and honour of the admirable Saint Teresa—Foundress of the Reformation of the discalced Carmelites, both men and women: a woman for angelical height of speculation, for masculine courage of performance more than a woman: who yet a child outran maturity, and durst plot a martyrdom."

The prose thrilled her even more intimately than the verse. She cried within herself: "Why have I never heard of Richard Crashaw? Why did Tom never tell me?" She became

upon the instant a devotee of this Saint Teresa. She thought inconsequently, with a pang that was also a reassurance : " George Cannon would never have understood this. But every one here understands it." And with hands enfevered she turned the pages again, and, after several disappointments, read :

Oh, thou undaunted daughter of desires !  
By all thy dower of lights and fires ;  
By all the eagle in thee, all the dove :  
By all thy lives and deaths of love :  
By thy large draughts of intellectual day,  
And by thy thirsts of love more large than they :  
By all thy brim-filled bowls of fierce desire,  
By this last morning's draught of liquid fire :  
By the full kingdom of that final kiss——

She ceased to read. It was as if her soul was crying out : " I also am Teresa. This is I ! This is I ! "

And then the door opened, and Martha appeared once more :

" If you please, sir, Mr. Edwin Clayhanger's called."

" Oh . . . well, I'm nearly finished. Where is he ? "

" In the breakfast-room, sir."

" Well, tell him I'll be down in a minute."

" Hilda," said Mrs. Orgreave, " will *you* mind going and telling him ? "

Hilda had replaced the book in its nest, and gone quickly back to her chair. The entrance of the servant at that moment, to announce Edwin Clayhanger, seemed to her startlingly dramatic. " What," she thought, " I am just reading that, and he comes ! "

" Certainly," she replied to Mrs. Orgreave. And she thought : " This is the second time she has sent me with a message to Edwin Clayhanger."

Suddenly, she blushed in confusion before the mistress of the home. " Is it possible," she asked herself,— " is it possible that Mrs. Orgreave doesn't guess what has happened to me ? Is it possible she can't see that I'm different from what I used to be ? If she knew . . . if they knew . . . here ! "

She left the room like a criminal. When she was going

down the stairs, she discovered that she held the "Signal" in her hand. She had no recollection of picking it up, and there was no object in taking it to the breakfast-room! She thought: "What a state I must be in!"

## CHAPTER II

### A RENDEZVOUS

#### I

"I SUPPOSE you've never thought about me once since I've left!"

She was sitting on the sofa in the small, shelved breakfast-room, and she shot these words at Edwin Clayhanger, who was standing near her. The singular words were certainly uttered out of bravado: they were a challenge to adventure. She thought: "It is madness for me to say such a thing." But such a thing had, nevertheless, come quite glibly out of her mouth, and she knew not why. If Edwin Clayhanger was startled, so was she startled.

"Oh yes, I have!" he stammered—of course, she had put him out of countenance.

She smiled, and said persuasively: "But you've never inquired after me."

"Yes, I have," he answered, with a hint of defiance, after a pause.

"Only once." She continued to smile.

"How do you know?" he demanded.

Then she told him very calmly, extinguishing the smile, that her source of information was Janet.

"That's nothing to go by!" he exclaimed, with sudden roughness. "That's nothing to go by—the number of *times* I've inquired!"

#### II

She was silenced. She thought: "If I am thus intimate with him, it must be because of the talk we had in the garden that night." And it seemed to her that the scene in the garden had somehow bound them together for ever in intimacy, that, even if they pretended to be only acquaintances, they

would constantly be breaking through the thin shell of formality into some unguessed deep of intimacy. She regarded—sur-reptitiously—his face, with a keen sense of pleasure. It was romantic, melancholy, wistful, enigmatic—and, above all, honest. She knew that he had desired to be an architect, and that his father had thwarted his desire, and this fact endowed him for her with the charm of a victim. The idea that all his life had been embittered and shadowed by the caprice of an old man was beautiful to her in its sadness: she contemplated it with vague bliss. At their last meeting, during the Sunday School Centenary, he had annoyed her; he had even drawn her disdain, by his lack of initiative and male force in the incident of the senile Sunday School teacher. He had profoundly disappointed her. Now, she simply forgot this; the sinister impression vanished from her mind. She recalled her first vision of him in the lighted doorway of his father's shop. Her present vision confirmed that sympathetic vision. She liked the feel of his faithful hand, and the glance of his timid and yet bellicose eye. And she reposed on his very apparent honesty as on a bed. She knew, with the assurance of perfect faith, that he had nothing dubious to conceal, and that no test could strain his magnanimity. And, while she so reflected, she was thinking, too, of Janet's fine dress, and her elegance and jewels, and wishing that she had changed the old black frock in which she travelled. The perception that she could never be like Janet cast her down. But, the next moment, she was saying to herself proudly: "What does it matter? Why should I be like Janet?" And, the next moment after that, she was saying, in another phase of her pride: "*I will be like Janet!*"

They began to discuss the strike. It was a topic which, during those weeks, could not be avoided, either by the rich or by the poor.

"I suppose you're like all the rest—against the men?" she challenged him again, inviting battle.

He replied bluntly: "What earthly right have you to suppose that I'm like all the rest?"

She bent her head lower, so that she could only see him through the veil of her eyelashes.



"I'm very sorry," she said, in a low, smiling, meditative voice. "I knew all the time you weren't."

The thought shot through her mind like a lance: "It is incredible, and horribly dangerous, that I should be sitting here with him, after all that has happened to me, and him without the slightest suspicion! . . . And yet what can stop it from coming out, sooner or later? Nothing can stop it."

Edwin Clayhanger continued to talk of the strike, and she heard him saying: "If you ask me, I'll tell you what I think—workmen on strike are always in the right . . . you've only got to look at them in a crowd together. They don't starve themselves for fun."

What he said thrilled her. There was nothing in it, but there was everything in it. His generosity towards the oppressed was everything to her. His whole attitude was utterly and mysteriously different from that of any other man whom she had known. . . . And with that simple, wistful expression of his!

They went on talking, and then, following in secret the train of her own thoughts, she suddenly burst out:

"I never met anybody like you before." A pause ensued. "No, never!" she added, with intense conviction.

"I might say the same of you," he replied, moved.

"Oh no! I'm nothing!" she breathed.

She glanced up, exquisitely flattered. His face was crimson. Exquisite moment, in the familiarity of the breakfast-room, by the fire, she on the sofa, with him standing over her, a delicious peril! The crimson slowly paled.

### III

Osmond Orgreave entered the room, quizzical, and at once began to tease Clayhanger about the infrequency of his visits.

Turning to Hilda, he said: "He scarcely ever comes to see us, except when you're here." It was just as if he had said: "I heard every word you spoke before I came in, and I have read your hearts." Both Hilda and Clayhanger were disconcerted—Clayhanger extremely so.

"Steady on!" he protested uncouthly. And then, with

the most naïve ingenuousness: "Mrs. Orgreave better?"

But Osmond Orgreave was not in a merciful mood. A moment later he was saying:

"Has she told you she wants to go over a printing-works?"

"No," Clayhanger answered, with interest. "But I shall be very pleased to show her over ours, any time."

Hilda, struck into silence, made no response, and instantly Clayhanger finished, in another tone: "Look here, I must be off. I only slipped in for a minute—really."

And he went, declining Mr. Orgreave's request to give a date for his next call. The bang of the front door resounded through the house.

Mr. Orgreave, having taken Clayhanger to the front door, did not return immediately into the breakfast-room. Hilda jumped up from the sofa, hesitant. She was disappointed; she was even resentful; assuredly she was humiliated. "Oh no!" she thought. "He's weak and afraid. . . . I dare say he went off because Janet wasn't here." She heard through the half-open door Mr. Orgreave's slippers on the tiles of the passage leading to the stairs.

Martha came into the room with a delighted, curious smile.

"If you please, miss, could you come into the hall a minute? . . . Some one to speak to you."

Hilda blushed silently, and obeyed. Clayhanger was standing in the chill hall, hat in hand. Her heart jumped.

"When will you come to look over our works?" he muttered rapidly and very nervously, and yet with a dictatorial gruffness. "To-morrow? I should like you to come."

He had put an enchantment upon her by this marvellous return. And to conceal from him what he had done, she frowned and kept silent.

"What time?" she asked suddenly.

"Any time." His eagerness was thrilling.

"Oh no! You must fix the time."

"Say between half-past six and a quarter to seven. That do?"

She nodded. Their hands met. He said adieu. He pulled open the heavy door. She saw his back for an instant against the pale gloom of the garden, in which vapour was

curling. And then she had shut the door, and was standing alone in the confined hall. A miracle had occurred, and it intimidated her. And, amid her wondrous fears, she was steeped in the unique sense of adventure. "This morning I was in Brighton," she thought. "Half an hour ago I had no notion of seeing him. And now! . . . And to-morrow?" The tragic sequel to one adventure had not impaired her instinct for experience. On the contrary, it had strengthened it. The very failure of the one excited her towards another. The zest of living was reborn in her. The morrow beckoned her, golden and miraculous. The faculty of men and women to create their own lives seemed divine, and the conception of it enfevered her.

### CHAPTER III

#### AT THE WORKS

##### I

**T**HAT night, late, Hilda and Janet shut themselves up in the bedroom together. The door clicked softly under Janet's gentle push, and they were as safe from invasion as if the door had been of iron, and locked and double-locked and barred with bars of iron. Alicia alone might have disturbed them, but Alicia was asleep. Hilda had a sense of entire security in this room such as she had never had since she drove away from Lessways Street, Turnhill, early one morning, with Florrie Bagster in a cab. It was not that there had been the least real fear of any room of hers being attacked: it was that this room seemed to have been rendered mystically inviolate by long years of Janet's occupation. "Janet's bedroom!"—the phrase had a sanction which could not possibly have attached itself to, for instance, "Hilda's bedroom!" Nor even to "mother's bedroom"—mother's bedroom being indeed at the mercy of any profane and marauding member of the family, a sort of market-place for the transaction of affairs.

And, further, Janet's bedroom was distinguished and made delicious for Hilda by its fire. It happened to be one of the very few bedrooms in the Five Towns at that date with a fire as a regular feature of it. Mrs. Orgreave had a fire in the parental bedroom, when she could not reasonably do without it, but Osmond Orgreave suffered the fire rather than enjoyed it. As for Tom, though of a shivery disposition, he would have dithered to death before admitting that a bedroom fire might increase his comfort. Johnnie and Jimmie genuinely liked to be cold in their bedroom. Alicia pined for a fire, but Mrs. Orgreave, imitating the contrariety of fate, forbade a fire to Alicia, and one consequence of this

was that Alicia sometimes undressed in Janet's bedroom, making afterwards a dash for the Pole. The idea of a bedroom was always, during nearly half the year, associated with the idea of discomfort in Hilda's mind. And now, in Janet's bedroom, impressed as she was by the strangeness of the fact that the prime reason for hurrying at top-speed into bed had been abolished, she yet positively could not linger, the force of habit being too strong for her. And she was in bed, despite efforts to dawdle, while Janet was still brushing her hair.

As she lay and watched Janet's complex unrobing, she acquired knowledge. And once more, she found herself desiring to be like Janet—not only in appearance, but in soft manner and tone. She thought: "How shall I dress to-morrow afternoon?" All the operations of her brain related themselves somehow to to-morrow afternoon. The anticipation of the visit to the printing-works burned in her heart like a steady lamp that shone through the brief, cloudy interests of the moment. And Edwin Clayhanger was precisely the topic which Janet seemed, as it were, expressly to avoid. Janet inquired concerning life at Brighton and the health of Sarah Gailey; Janet even mentioned George Cannon; Hilda steadied her voice in replying, though she was not really apprehensive, for Janet's questions, like the questions of the whole family, were invariably discreet and respectful of the individual's privacy. But of Edwin Clayhanger, whose visit nevertheless had been recounted to her in the drawing-room on her return, Janet said not a word.

And then, when she had extinguished the gas, and the oriental sleeve of her silk nightgown delicately brushed Hilda's face, as she got into bed, she remarked:

"Strange that Edwin Clayhanger should call just to-night!"

Hilda's cheek warmed.

"He asked me to go and look over their printing-works to-morrow," said she quickly.

Janet was taken aback.

"Really!" she exclaimed, unmistakably startled. She spoke a second too soon. If she had delayed only one second, she might have concealed from Hilda that which Hilda



had most plainly perceived, to wit, anxiety and jealousy. Yes, jealousy, in this adorably benevolent creature's tone. Hilda's interest in to-morrow afternoon was intensified.

"Shall you be able to come?" she asked.

"What time?"

"He said about half-past six, or a quarter to seven."

"I can't," said Janet dreamily, "because of that Musical Society meeting—you know—I told you, didn't I?"

In the faint light of the dying fire, Hilda made out little by little the mysterious, pale heaps of clothes, and all the details of the room strewn and disordered by reason of an additional occupant. The adventure was now of infinite complexity, and its complexity seemed to be symbolized by the suggestive feminine mysteriousness of what she saw and what she divined in the darkness of the chamber. She thought: "I am here on false pretences. I ought to tell my secret. That would be fair—I have no right to intrude between her and him." But she instinctively and powerfully resisted such ideas; with firmness she put them away, and yielded herself with a more exquisite apprehension to the anticipation of to-morrow.

## II

The order of meals at Lane End was somewhat peculiar even then, and would now be almost unique. It was partly the natural expression of an instinctive and justified feeling of superiority, and partly due to a discretion which forbade the family to scandalize the professional classes of the district by dining at night. Dinner occurred in the middle of the day, and about nine in the evening was an informal but copious supper. Between those two meals, there came a tea which was neither high nor low, and whose hour, six o'clock in theory, depended to a certain extent, in practice, on Mr. Orgreave's arrival from the office. Not seldom Mr. Orgreave was late; occasionally he was very late. The kitchen waited to infuse the tea until a command came from some woman, old or young, who attentively watched a window for a particular swinging of the long gate at the end of the garden, or listened, when it was dark, for the bang of the gate and a particular crunching of gravel.

On this Tuesday evening, Osmond Orgreave was very late, and the movement of the household was less smooth than usual, owing to Mrs. Orgreave's illness and to the absence of Janet at Hillport in connection with the projected Hillport Choral Society. (Had Janet been warned of Hilda's visit, she would not have accepted an invitation to a tea at Hillport as a preliminary to the meeting of the provisional committee.) Hilda was in a state of acute distress. The appointment with Edwin Clayhanger seemed to be absolutely sacred to her: to be late for it would amount to a crime: to miss it altogether would be a calamity inconceivable. The fingers of all the clocks in the house were revolving with the most extraordinary rapidity—she was helpless.

She was helpless, because she had said nothing all day of her appointment, and because Janet had not mentioned it either. Janet might have said before leaving: "Tea had better not wait too long—Hilda has to be down at Clayhanger's at half-past six." Janet's silence impressed Hilda: it was not merely strange—it was formidable: it affected the whole day. Hilda thought: "Is she determined not to speak of it unless I do?" Immediately Janet was gone, Hilda had run up to the bedroom. She was minded to change the black frock which she had been wearing, and which she hated, and to put on another skirt and bodice that Janet had praised. She longed to beautify herself, and yet she was still hesitating about it at half-past five in the evening as she had hesitated at eight o'clock in the morning. In the end she had decided not to change, on account of the rain. But the rain had naught to do with her decision. She would not change, because she was too proud to change. She would go just as she was! She could not accept the assistance of an attractive bodice! . . . Unfeminine, perhaps, but womanly.

At twenty-five minutes to seven, she went into Mrs. Orgreave's bedroom, rather like a child, and also rather like an adult creature in a distracting crisis. Tom Orgreave and Alicia were filling the entire house with the stormy noise of a piano duet based upon Rossini's "William Tell."

"I think I'll miss tea, Mrs. Orgreave," she said. "Edwin

Clayhanger invited me to go over the printing-works at half-past six, and it's twenty-five minutes to seven now."

"Oh, but, my dear," cried Mrs. Orgreave, "why ever didn't you tell them downstairs, or let me know earlier?"

And she pulled at the bell-rope that overhung the head of the bed. Not a trace of teasing archness in her manner! Hilda's appointment might have been of the most serious business interest, for anything Mrs. Orgreave's demeanour indicated to the contrary. Hilda stood mute and constrained.

"You run down and tell them to make tea at once, dear. I can't let you go without anything at all. I wonder what can have kept Osmond."

Almost at the same moment, Osmond Orgreave entered the bedroom. His arrival had been unnoticed amid the tremendous resounding of the duet.

"Oh, Osmond," said his wife, "wherever have you been so late? Hilda wants to go—Edwin Clayhanger has invited her to go over the works."

Hilda, trembling at the door, more than half expected Mr. Orgreave to say: "You mean, she's invited herself." But Osmond received the information with exactly the same polite, apologetic seriousness as his wife, and, reassured, Hilda departed from the room.

Ten minutes later, veiled and cloaked, she stepped out alone into the garden. And instantly her torment was assuaged, and she was happy. She waited at the corner of the street for the steam-car. But, when the car came thundering down, it was crammed to the step; with a melancholy gesture, the driver declined her signal. She set off down Trafalgar Road in the mist and the rain, glad that she had been compelled to walk. It seemed to her that she was on a secret and mystic errand. This was not surprising. The remarkable thing was that all the hurrying people she met seemed also each of them to be on a secret and mystic errand. The shining wet pavement was dotted with dark figures, suggestive and enigmatic, who glided over a floor that was pierced by perpendicular reflections.

## III

In the Clayhanger shop, agitated and scarcely aware of what she did, she could, nevertheless, hear her voice greeting Edwin Clayhanger in firm, calm tones; and she soon perceived very clearly that he was even more acutely nervous than herself: which perception helped to restore her confidence, while, at the same time, it filled her with bliss. The young, fair man, with his awkward and constrained movements, took possession of her umbrella, and then suggested that she should remove her mackintosh. She obeyed, timid and glad. She stripped off her mackintosh, as though she were stripping off her modesty, and stood before him revealed. To complete the sacrifice, she raised her veil, and smiled up at him, as it were, asking: "What next?" Then a fat, untidy old man appeared in the doorway of a cubicle within the shop, and Edwin Clayhanger blushed.

"Father, this is Miss Lessways. Miss Lessways, my father. . . . She's—she's come to look over the place."

"How-d'ye-do, miss?"

She shook hands with the tyrannic father, who was, however, despite his reputation, apparently just as nervous as the son. There followed a most sinister moment of silence. And, at last, the shop door opened, and the father turned to greet a customer. Hilda thought: "Suppose this fat old man is one day my father-in-law? Is it possible to imagine him as a father-in-law?" And she had a transient gleam of curiosity concerning the characters of the two Clayhanger sisters, and recalled with satisfaction that Janet liked the elder one.

Edwin Clayhanger, muttering, pointed to an aperture in the counter, and immediately she was going through it with him, and through a door at the back of the shop. They were alone, facing a rain-soaked yard. Edwin Clayhanger sneezed violently.

"It keeps on raining," Edwin murmured. "Better to have kept umbrella! However——"

He glanced at her inquiringly and invitingly. They ran side by side across the yard to a roofed flight of steps that led to the printing-office. For a couple of seconds, the rain wet them, and then they were under cover again. It seemed

to Hilda that they had escaped from the shop like fox-terriers—like two friendly dogs from the surveillance of an incalculable and dangerous old man. She felt a comfortable, friendly confidence in Edwin Clayhanger—a tranquil sentiment such as she had never experienced for George Cannon. After more than a year—and what a period of unforeseen happenings!—she thought again: “*I like him.*” Not love, she thought, but liking! She liked being with him. She liked the sensation of putting confidence in him. She liked his youth, and her own. She was sorry because he had a cold and was not taking care of it. . . . Now they were climbing a sombre creaking staircase towards a new and remote world that was separated from the common world just quitted by the adventurous passage of the rainy yard. . . . And now they were amid oily odours in a large raftered workshop, full of machines. . . . The printing-works! . . . An enormous but very deferential man saluted them with majestic solemnity. He was the foreman, and labelled by his white apron as an artisan, but his gigantic bulk—he would have outweighed the pair of them—and his age set him somehow over them, so that they were a couple of striplings in his vasty presence. When Edwin Clayhanger employed, as it were, daringly, the accents of a master to this intimidating fellow, Hilda thrilled with pleasure at the piquancy of the spectacle, and she was admiringly proud of Edwin. The foreman’s immense voice, explaining machines and tools, caused physical vibrations in her. But she understood nothing of what he said—nothing whatever. She was in a dream of oily odours and monstrous iron constructions, dominated by the grand foreman: and Edwin was in the dream. She began talking quite wildly of the four-hundredth anniversary of the inventor of printing, of which she had read in Cranswick’s History . . . at Brighton! Brighton had sunk away over the verge of memory. Even Lane End House was lost somewhere in the vague past. All her previous life had faded. She reflected guiltily: “He’s bound to think I’ve been reading about printing because I was interested in *him*! I don’t care! I hope he does think it!” She heard a suggestion that, as it was too late that night to see the largest machine in motion, she might call the next afternoon. She at once promised to come. . . .



She impatiently desired now to leave the room where they were, and to see something else. And then she feared lest this might be all there was to see. . . . Edwin Clayhanger was edging towards the door. . . . They were alone on the stairway again. . . . The foreman had bowed at the top like a chamberlain. . . . She gathered, with delicious anticipation, that other and still more recondite interiors awaited their visit.

## IV

They were in an attic which was used for the storage of reams upon reams of paper. By the light of a candle in a tin candlestick, they had passed alone together through corridors and up flights of stairs at the back of the shop. She had seen everything that was connected with the enterprise of steam-printing, and now they were at the top of the old house and at the end of the excursion.

"I used to work here," said Edwin Clayhanger.

She inquired about the work.

"Well," he drawled, "reading and writing, you know—at that very table."

In the aperture of the window, amid piles of paper, stood a rickety old table, covered with dust.

"But there's no fire-place," she said, glancing round the room, and then directly at him.

"I know."

"But how did you do in winter?" she eagerly appealed.

And he replied shortly, and with a slight charming affection of pride: "I did without."

Her throat tightened, and she could feel the tears suddenly swim in her eyes. She was not touched by the vision of his hardships. It was the thought of all his youth that exquisitely saddened her—of all the years which were and would be for ever hidden from her. She knew that she alone of all human beings was gifted with the power to understand and fully sympathize with him. And so she grieved over the long wilderness of time during which he had been uncomprehended. She wanted, by some immense effort of tenderness, to recompense him for all that he had suffered.

And she had a divine curiosity concerning the whole of his past life. She had never had this curiosity in relation to George Cannon—she had only wondered about his affairs with other women. Nor had George Cannon ever evoked the tenderness which sprang up in her from some secret and inexhaustible source at the mere sight of Edwin Clayhanger's wistful smile. Still, in that moment, standing close to Edwin in the high solitude of the shadowed attic, the souvenir of George Cannon gripped her painfully. She thought: "He loves me, and he is ruined, and he will never see me again! And I am here, bursting with hope renewed, and dizzy with joy!" And she pictured Janet, too, wearying herself at a committee meeting. And she thought, "And here am I . . . !" Her bliss was tragic.

"I think I ought to be going," she said softly.

They re-threaded the corridors, and in each lower room, as they passed, Edwin Clayhanger extinguished the gas which he had lit there on the way up, and Hilda waited for him. And then they were back in the crude glare of the shop. The fat, untidy old man was not visible. Edwin helped her with the mackintosh, and she liked him for the awkwardness of his efforts in doing so.

At the door, she urged him not to come out, and referred to his cold.

"This isn't the end of winter, it's the beginning," she warned him. Nobody else, she knew, would watch over him.

But he insisted on coming out.

They arranged a rendezvous for three o'clock on the morrow, and then they shook hands.

"Now, do go in," she entreated, as she hurried away. The rain had ceased. She fled triumphantly up Trafalgar Road, with her secret, guarding it. "He's in love with me!" If a scientific truth is a statement of which the contrary is inconceivable, then it was a scientific truth for her that she and Edwin must come together. She simply would not and could not conceive the future without him. . . . And this so soon, so precipitately soon, after her misfortune! But it was her very misfortune which pushed her violently forward. Her life had been convulsed and overthrown

by the hazard of destiny, and she could have no peace now until she had repaired and re-established it. At no matter what risk, the thing must be accomplished quickly . . . quickly.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CALL FROM BRIGHTON

#### I

ON the next afternoon, at a quarter-past two, Hilda and Janet were sitting together in the breakfast-room. The house was still. The men were either theoretically or practically at business. Alicia was at school. Mrs. Orgreave lay upstairs. The servants had cleared away and washed up the dinner-things, and had dined themselves. The kitchen had been cleansed and put in order, and every fire replenished. Two of the servants were in their own chambers, enfranchised for an hour : one only remained on duty. All six women had the feeling, which comes to most women at a certain moment in each day, that life had, for a time, deteriorated into the purposeless and the futile ; and that it waited, as in a trance, until some external masculine event, expected or unforeseen, should renew its virtue and its energy.

Hilda was in half a mind to tell Janet the history of the past year. She had wakened up in the night, and perceived with dreadful clearness that trouble lay in front of her. The relations between herself and Edwin Clayhanger were developing with the most dizzy rapidity, and in a direction which she desired ; but it would be impossible for her, if she fostered the relations, to continue to keep Edwin in ignorance of the fact that, having been known for about a fortnight as Mrs. George Cannon, she was not what he supposed her to be. With imagination on fire, she was anticipating the rendezvous at three o'clock. She reached forward to it in ecstasy ; but she might not enjoy it, save at the price which her conscience exacted. She had to say to Edwin Clayhanger that she had been the victim of a bigamist. Could she say it to him ? She had not been able to say it even to Janet Orgreave. . . . She would say it first to Janet. There, in the breakfast-

room, she would say it. If it killed her to say it, she would say it. She must at any cost be able to respect herself, and, as matters stood, she could not respect herself.

Janet, on her kness, was idly arranging books on one of the lower bookshelves. In sheer nervousness, Hilda also dropped to her knees on the hearthrug, and began to worry the fire with the poker.

"I say, Janet," she began.

"Yes?" Janet did not look up.

Hilda, her heart beating, thought, with affrighted swiftness: "Why should I tell her? It is no business of anybody's except *his*. I will tell him, and him alone, and then act according to his wishes. After all, I am not to blame. I am quite innocent. But I won't tell him to-day. Not to-day! I must be more sure. It would be ridiculous to tell him to-day. If I told him it would be almost like inviting a proposal! But when the proper time comes,—then I will tell him, and he will understand! He is bound to understand perfectly. He's in love with me."

She dared not tell Janet. In that abode of joyful and successful propriety the words would not form themselves. And the argument that she was not to blame carried no weight whatever. She—she, Hilda—lacked courage to be candid. . . . This was extremely disconcerting to her self-esteem. . . . And even with Edwin Clayhanger she wished to temporize. She longed for nothing so much as to see him; and yet she feared to meet him.

"Yes?" Janet repeated.

A bell rang faintly in the distance of the house.

Hilda, suddenly choosing a course, said: "I forgot to tell you. I'm supposed to be going down to Clayhanger's at three to see a machine at work—it was too late last night. Do come with me. I hate going by myself." It was true: in that instant she did hate going by herself. She thought, knowing Janet to be at liberty and never dreaming that she would refuse: "I am saved—for the present."

But Janet answered self-consciously:

"I don't think I must leave mother. You'll be perfectly all right by yourself."

Hilda impetuously turned her head; their glances met for



an instant, in suspicion, challenge, animosity. They had an immense mutual admiration the one for the other, these two ; and yet now they were estranged. Esteem was nullified by instinct. Hilda thought with positive savagery : " It's all fiddlesticks about not leaving her mother ! She's simply on her high horse ! " The whole colour of existence was changed.

## II

Martha entered the room. Neither of the girls moved. Beneath the deferential servant in Martha was a human girl, making a third in the room, who familiarly divined the moods of the other two and judged them as an equal ; and the other two knew it, and therefore did not trouble to be spectacular in front of her.

" A letter, miss," said Martha, approaching Hilda. " The old postman says it was insufficiently addressed, or it 'ud ha' been here by first post."

" Was that the postman who rang just now ? " asked Janet.

" Yes, miss."

Hilda took the letter with apprehension, as she recognized the down-slanting calligraphy of Sarah Gailey. Yes, the address was imperfect—" Miss Lessways, c/o Osmond Orgreave, Esq., Lane End House, Knype-on-Trent," instead of " Bursley, Knype-on-Trent." On the back of the envelope had been written in pencil by an official, " Try Bursley." Sarah Gailey could not now be trusted to address an envelope correctly. The mere handwriting seemed to announce misfortune.

" From poor Sarah," Hilda murmured, with false, good-tempered tranquillity. " I wonder what sort of trouble she thinks she's got into."

She thought : " If only I was married, I should be free of responsibility about Sarah. I should have to think of my husband first. But nothing else can free me. Unless I marry, I'm tied to Sarah Gailey as long as she lives. . . . And why ? . . . I should like to know ! " The answer was simple : habit had shackled her to Sarah Gailey.

She opened the letter by the flickering firelight, which was

stronger on the hearthrug than the light of the dim November day. It began: "Dearest Hilda, I write at once to tell you that a lawyer called here this afternoon to inquire about your Hotel Continental shares. He told me there was going to be some difficulty with the Company, and, unless the independent shareholders formed a strong local committee to look after things, the trouble might be serious. He wanted to know if you would support a committee at the meeting. I gave him your address, and he's going to write to you. But I thought I would write to you as well. His name is Eustace Broughton, 124, East Street, in case. I do hope nothing will go wrong. It is like what must be, I am sure! It has been impossible for me to keep the charwoman. So I sent her off this morning. Can you remember the address of that Mrs. Catkin? . . ." Sarah Gailey continued to discuss boarding-house affairs, until she arrived at the end of the fourth page, and then, in a few cramped words, she finished with expressions of love.

"Oh dear!" Hilda exclaimed, rising, "I must write some letters at once." She sighed, as if in tedium. The fact that her fortune was vaguely threatened did not cause her anxiety: she scarcely realized it. What she saw was an opportunity to evade the immediate meeting with Edwin—the meeting which, a few minutes earlier, she had desired beyond everything.

"When? Now?"

Hilda nodded.

"But what about Master Edwin?" Janet asked, trying to be gay.

"I shan't be able to go," said Hilda carelessly, at the door. "It's of no consequence."

"Martha has to go down town. If you like, she could call in there, and just tell him."

It was a reproof, from the young woman who always so thoughtfully studied the feelings of everybody.

"I'll just write a little note, then, thanks!" Hilda returned calmly, triumphing after all over Janet's superiority, and thinking, "Janet can be very peculiar, Janet can!"

## III

For more than twenty hours, Hilda was profoundly miserable. Towards the evening of the same day, she had made herself quite sure that Edwin Clayhanger would call that night. Her hope persisted until half-past nine : it then began to fade, and, at ten o'clock, was extinct. His name had been mentioned by nobody. She went to bed. Having now a room of her own, which overlooked the Clayhanger garden and house, she gazed forth, and, in the dark, beheld, with the most anxious sensations, the building in which Edwin existed and was concealed. "He is there," she said. "He is active about something at this very instant—perhaps he is reading. He is close by. If I shouted, he might hear. . . ." And yet she was utterly cut off from him. Again, in the late dawn, she saw the same building, pale and clear, but just as secretive and enigmatic as in the night. "He is asleep yet," she thought. "Why did he not call? Is he hurt? Is he proud?"

She despaired, because she could devise no means of resuming communication with him.

Immediately after dinner on the next day, she went with Janet to Janet's room, to examine a new winter cloak which had been delivered. And, while Janet was trying it on, and posing coquettishly and yet without affectation in front of the glass, and while Hilda was reflecting jealously, "Why am I not like her? I know infinitely more than she knows. I am a woman, and she is a girl, and yet she seems far more a woman than I——" Alicia, contrary to all rules, took the room by storm. Alicia's excuse and salvation lay in a telegram, which she held in her hand.

"For you, Hilda!" cried the child, excited. "I'm just off to school."

Hilda reached to take the offered telegram, but her hand wavered around it instead of seizing it. Her eye fastened on a circular portion of the wall-paper pattern, and she felt that the whole room was revolving about her. Then she saw Janet's face transformed by an expression of alarm.

"Are you ill, Hilda?" Janet demanded. "Sit down."

"You're frightfully pale," said Alicia eagerly.

Hilda sat down.

"No, no," she said. "It was the pattern of the wall-paper that made me feel dizzy." And, for the moment, she did honestly believe that the pattern of the wall-paper had, in some inexplicable manner, upset her. "I'm all right now."

The dizziness passed as suddenly as it had supervened. Janet held some ineffectual salts to her nose.

"I'm perfectly well," insisted Hilda.

"How funny!" Alicia grinned.

Calmly Hilda opened the telegram, which read: "Please come at once.—Gailey."

She gave the telegram to Janet in silence.

"What can be the matter?" Janet asked, with unreserved, loving solicitude. The cloud which had hung between the two enthusiastic friends was dissipated in a flash.

"I haven't an idea," said Hilda, touched. "Unless it's those shares!" She had briefly told Janet about the Hotel Continental Limited.

"Shall you go?"

Hilda nodded. Never again would she ignore an urgent telegram, though she did not believe that this telegram had any real importance. She attributed it to Sarah's increasing incompetence and hysterical foolishness.

"I wonder whether I can get on to Brighton to-night if I take the six train?" Hilda asked; and to herself: "Can it have anything to do with George?"

Alicia, endowed with authority, went in search of a Bradshaw. But the quest was fruitless. In the Five Towns the local time-table, showing the connections with London, suffices for the citizen, and the breast-pocket of no citizen is complete without it.

"Clayhangers are bound to have a Bradshaw," cried Alicia, breathless with running about the house.

"Of course they are," Janet agreed.

"I'll walk down there now," said Hilda, with extraordinary promptitude. "It won't take five minutes."

"I'd go," said Alicia, "only I should be late for school."

"Shall I send some one down?" Janet suggested. "You might be taken dizzy again."

"No, thanks," Hilda replied deliberately. "I'll go—myself. There's nothing wrong with me at all."

"You'll have to be sharp over it," said Alicia pertly. "Don't forget it's Thursday. They shut up at two, and it's not far off two now."

"I'm going this very minute," said Hilda.

"And I'm going this very second!" Alicia retorted.

They all three left Janet's bedroom; the new cloak, cast over a chair-back, was degraded into a tedious banality—and ignored.

In less than a minute Hilda, hatted and jacketed and partially gloved, was crossing the garden. She felt most miraculously happy and hopeful, and she was full of irrational gratitude to Alicia, as though Alicia were a benefactor! The change in her mood seemed magic in its swiftness. If Janet, with calm, cryptic face, had not been watching her from the doorway, she might have danced on the gravel.



CHAPTER V  
THURSDAY AFTERNOON

I

SHE was walking with Edwin Clayhanger up Duck Bank on the way to Bursley railway station. A simple errand and promenade,—and yet she felt herself to be steeped in the romance of an adventure! The adventure had surprisingly followed upon the discovery that Alicia had been quite wrong. “Clayhangers are bound to have a Bradshaw,” the confident Alicia had said. But Clayhangers happened not to have a Bradshaw. Edwin was alone in the stationery shop, save for the assistant. He said that his father was indisposed. And whereas the news that Clayhangers had no Bradshaw left Hilda perfectly indifferent, the news that old Darius Clayhanger was indisposed and absent produced in her a definite feeling of gladness. Edwin had decided that the most likely place to search for a Bradshaw was the station, and he had offered to escort her to the station. Nothing could have been more natural, and at the same time more miraculous.

The sun was palely shining upon dry, clean pavements and upon roads juicy with black mud. And in the sunshine Hilda was very happy. It was nothing to her that she was in quest of a Bradshaw because she had just received an ominous telegram urgently summoning her to Brighton. She was obviously happy. Every phenomenon that attracted her notice contributed to her felicity. Thus she took an eager joy in the sun. And a marked improvement in Edwin’s cold really delighted her. She was dominated by the intimate conviction: “He loves me!” Which conviction excited her dormant pride, and made her straighten her shoulders. She benevolently condescended towards Janet. After all Janet, with every circumstance in her favour, had not known

how to conquer Edwin Clayhanger. After all she, Hilda, possessed some mysterious characteristic more potent than the elegance and the goodness of Janet Orgreave. She scorned her former self-deprecations, and reproached her own lack of faith: "I am I!" That was the summary of her mood. As for her attitude to Edwin Clayhanger, she could not explain it. Why did she like him and like being with him? He was not brilliant, nor masterful, nor handsome, nor well dressed, nor in any manner imposing. Oh the contrary, he was awkward and apologetic, and not a bit spectacular. Only the wistful gaze of his eyes, and his honest smile, and the appeal of his gestures . . . ! A puzzling affair, an affair perfectly incomprehensible and enchanting.

They walked side by side in silence.

When they had turned into Moorthorne Road, half-way up whose slope lies the station, she asked a question about a large wooden building from whose interior came wild sounds of shouting and cheering, and learnt that the potters on strike were holding a meeting in the town theatre. At the open outer doors was a crowd of starving, shivering, dirty, ragged children, who romped and cursed, or stood unnaturally meditative in the rich mud, like fakirs fulfilling a vow. Hilda's throat was constricted by the sight. Pain and joy ran together in her, burning exquisitely; and she had a glimpse, obscure, of the mystical beauty of the children's suffering.

"I'd no idea there was a theatre in Bursley," she remarked idly, driven into a banality by the press of her sensations.

"They used to call it the Blood Tub," he replied. "Melodrama and murder and gore—you know."

She exclaimed in horror: "Why are people like that in the Five Towns?"

"It's our form of poetry, I suppose," said he.

She started, sensitively. It seemed to her that she had never understood the secret inner spirit of the Five Towns, and that by a single phrase he had made her understand it. . . . 'Our form of poetry'! Who but he could have said a thing at once so illuminating and so simple?

Apparently perplexed by the obvious effect on her of his remark, he said:

"But you belong to the Five Towns, don't you?"

She answered quietly that she did. But her heart was saying: "I do *now*. You have initiated me. I never felt the Five Towns before. You have made me feel them."

## II

At the station the head porter received their inquiry for a Bradshaw with a dull stare and a shake of the head. No such thing had ever been asked for at Bursley Station before, and the man's imagination could not go beyond the soiled time-tables loosely pinned and pasted up on the walls of the booking-office. Hilda suggested that the ticket-clerk should be interrogated, but the aperture of communication with him was shut. She saw Edwin Clayhanger brace himself and rap on the wood; and instead of deploring his diffidence she liked it and found it full of charm. The partition clicked aside, and the ticket-clerk's peering suspicious head showed in its place mutely demanding a reason for this extraordinary disturbance of the dream in which the station slumbered between two half-hourly trains. With a characteristic peculiar slanting motion Edwin nodded.

"Oh, how-d'ye-do, Mr. Brooks?" said Edwin hastily, as if startled by the sudden inexplicable apparition of the head.

But the ticket-clerk had no Bradshaw either. He considered it probable, however, that the stationmaster would have a Bradshaw. Edwin had to brace himself again, for an assault upon the fastness of the stationmaster.

And in the incredibly small and incredibly dirty fastness of the stationmaster, they indeed found a Bradshaw. Hilda precipitately took it and opened it on the stationmaster's table. She looked for Brighton in it as she might have looked for a particular individual in a city. Then Edwin was bending over it, with his ear close to her ear, and the sleeve of his overcoat touching her sleeve. She was physically aware of him, for the first time. She thought, disconcerted: "But he is an utter stranger to me! What do I know of him?" And then she thought: "For more than a year he must have carried my image in his heart!"

"Here," said Edwin brusquely, and with a certain superiority, "you might just let me have a look at it myself."

She yielded, tacitly admitting that a woman was no match for Bradshaw.

After a few moments' frowning Edwin said :

"Yes, there's a train to Brighton at eleven-thirty to-night !"

"May I look ?"

"Certainly," said he, subtly condescending.

She examined the page, with a serious deliberation.

"But what does this '*f*' mean ?" she asked. "Did you notice this '*f*' ?"

"Yes. It means Thursdays and Saturdays only," said Edwin, his eyes twinkling. It was as if he had said : "You think yourself very clever, but do you suppose that I can't read the notes in a time-table ?"

"Well——" She hesitated.

"To-day's Thursday, you see," he remarked curtly.

She was ravished by his tone and his manner. And she became humble before him, for in the space of a few seconds he had grown mysteriously and powerfully masculine to her. But with all his masculinity there remained the same wistful, honest, boyish look in his eyes. And she thought : "If I marry him it will be for the look in his eyes."

"I'm all right, then," she said aloud, and smiled.

With hands nervously working within her muff, she suddenly missed the handkerchief which she had placed there.

"I believe I must have dropped my handkerchief in your shop !" she was about to say. The phrase was actually on her tongue ; but by a strange instinctive, defensive discretion she shut her mouth on it and kept silence. She thought : "Perhaps I had better not go into his shop again to-day."

### III

They descended the hill from the station. Hilda was very ill at ease. She kept saying to herself : "This adventure is over now. I cannot prolong it. There is nothing to do but to go back to the Orgreaves, and pack my things and depart to Brighton, and face whatever annoyance is awaiting me at Brighton." The prospect desolated her. She could not bear to leave Edwin Clayhanger without some definition of their relations, and yet she knew that it was hopeless and

absurd to expect to arrive immediately at any such definition : she knew that the impetuosity of her temperament could not be justified. Also, she feared horribly the risk of being caught again in the net of Brighton. As they got lower and lower down the hill, her wretchedness and disquiet became acute, to the point of a wild despair. Merely to temporize, she said, as they drew opposite the wooden theatre :

“ Couldn’t we just go and look in ? I’ve got plenty of time.”

A strange request—to penetrate into a meeting of artisans on strike ! She felt its strangeness : she felt that Edwin Clayhanger objected, but she was driven to an extremity. She had to do something, and she did what she could.

They crossed the road, and entered the huge shanty, and stood apologetically near the door. The contrast between the open street and the enclosed stuffiness of the dim and crowded interior was overwhelming. Hundreds of ragged and shabby men sat in serried rows, leaning forward with elbows out and heads protruding as they listened to a speech from the gimcrack stage. They seemed to be waiting to spring, like famished and ferocious tigers. Interrupting, they growled, snarled, yapped, and swore with appalling sincerity. Imprecations burst forth in volleys and in running fires. The arousing of the fundamental instincts of these human beings had, indeed, enormously emphasized the animal in them. They had swung back a hundred centuries towards original crude life. The sophistication which embroiders the will-to-live had been stripped clean off. These men helped you to understand the state of mind which puts a city to the sack, and makes victims especially of the innocent and the defenceless. Hilda was strangely excited. She was afraid, and enjoyed being afraid. And it was as if she, too, had been returned to savagery and to the primeval. In the midst of peril, she was a female under the protection of a male, and nothing but that. And she was far closer, emotionally, to her male than she had ever been before.

Suddenly, the meeting came to an end. In an instant, the mass of humanity was afoot and rounding upon them, an active menace. Hilda and Edwin rushed fleeing into the street, violently urged by a common impulse. The stream



of embittered men pursued them like an inundation. When they were safe, and breathing the free air, Hilda was drenched with a sense of pity. The tragedy of existence presented itself in its true aspect, as noble and majestic and intimidating.

"It's terrible!" she breathed.

She thought: "No! In this mood, it is impossible for me to leave him! I cannot do it! I cannot!" The danger of re-entering the shop, which would be closed now, utterly fascinated her. Supposing that she re-entered the shop with him, would she have the courage to tell him that she was in his society under false pretences? Could she bring herself to relate her misfortune? She recoiled before the mere idea of telling him. And yet the danger of the shop glittered in front of her like a lure.

The future might be depending solely on her own act. If she told him of the lost handkerchief, the future might be one thing: if she did not tell him, it might be another.

The dread of choosing seized her, and put her into a tremble of apprehension. And then, as it were mechanically, she murmured (but very clearly), tacking the words without a pause on to a sentence about the strikes: "Oh, I've lost my handkerchief, unless I've left it in your shop! It must have dropped out of my muff."

She sighed in relief, because she had chosen. But her agitation was intensified.

#### IV

In search of a lost handkerchief, they regained the Clay-hanger premises by an unfamiliar side door. She preceded him along a passage and then, taking a door on the left, found herself surprisingly in the shop, behind a counter. The shop was lighted only by a few diamond-shaped holes in the central shutters, and it had a troubling aspect of portent, with its merchandise mysteriously enveloped in pale sheets, and its chairs wrong side up, and its deep-shadowed corners. Destiny might have been lurking in one of those baffling corners. From above, through the ceiling, came the vibration of some machine at work, and the machine might have been the loom of time. Hilda was exquisitely apprehensive. She thought: "I am here. The moment of my departure will

come. When it comes, shall I have told him my misfortune? What will have happened?" She waited, nervous, restless, shaking like a victim who can do naught but wait.

"Here's my handkerchief!" she cried, in a tone of unnatural childish glee, that was one of the effects of her secret panic.

The handkerchief glimmered on the counter, more white than anything else in that grey dusk. She guessed that the shop-assistant must have found it, and placed it conspicuously on the counter.

They were alone: they were their own prisoners, secure from the street and from all interruption. Hilda, once more and in a higher degree, realized the miraculous human power to make experience out of nothing. They had nothing but themselves, and they could, if they chose, create all the future by a single gesture.

Suddenly, there came a tremendous shouting from Duck Square, in front of the shop. The strikers had poured down from Moorthorne Road into Duck Bank and Duck Square.

Edwin, who was in the middle of the shop, went to the glazed inner doors, and, passing through into the porch, lifted the letter-flap in a shutter, and, stooping, looked forth. He called to her, without moving his face from the aperture, that a fight was in progress. Hilda gazed at his back, through the glass, and then, coming round the end of the counter, approached quietly, and stood immediately behind him, between the glazed doors and the shutters. The two were in a space so small that they could scarcely have moved without touching.

"Let me look," she stammered, unable any longer to tolerate the inaction.

Edwin Clayhanger stepped aside, and held up the letter-flap for her with his finger. She bent her head to the oblong glimpse of the street, and saw the strikers engaged in the final internecine folly of strikers: they had turned their exasperated wrath upon each other. Within a public-house at the top of the little Square, other strikers were drinking. One policeman regarded them.

"What a shame!" she cried angrily, dropping the flap, and then withdrew quickly into the shop whither Edwin had

gone. As she came near him, her mood changed. She smiled gently. She summoned all her charm ; and she knew that she charmed him.

"Do you know," she said, "you've quite altered my notion of poetry—what you said as we were going up to the station !"

"Really ?" He flushed.

Yes, she had enchanted and entranced him. She had only to smile and to use a particular tone, soft and breaking. . . . She knew that.

"But you *do* alter my notions," she continued, and her clear voice was poured out like a liquid. "I don't know how it is . . ." She stopped. And then, in half-playful accents : "So this is your little office !"

Her hand was on the knob of the open door of the cubicle, a black erection within the shop, where Edwin and his father kept the accounts and wrote letters.

"Yes. Go in and have a look at it."

She murmured kindly : "Shall I ?" and went in. He followed.

For a moment, she was extremely afraid, and she whispered, scared : "I must hurry off now."

He ignored this remark.

"Shall you be at Brighton long ?" he demanded. And he was so friendly and simple and timorous and honest-eyed, and his features had such an extraordinary anxious expression that her own fear seemed to leave her. She thought, as if surprised by the discovery : "He is a good friend."

"Oh, I can't tell," she answered him. "It depends."

"How soon shall you be down our way again ?" His voice was thickening. She shook her head, speechless. She was afraid again now. His face altered. He was standing almost over her. She thought : "I am lost ! I have let it come to this !" He was no longer a good friend.

He began to speak, in detached bits of phrases :

"I say—you know——"

"Good-bye, good-bye," she murmured anxiously. "I must go. Thanks very much."

And foolishly, she held out her hand, which he seized. He bent passionately, and kissed her like a fresh boy, like a

schoolboy. And she gave back the kiss strongly, with all the profound sincerity of her nature. His agitation appeared to be extreme ; but she was calm ; she was divinely calm. She savoured the moment as though she had been a watcher, and not an actor in the scene. She thought, with a secret sigh of bliss : " Yes, it is real, this moment ! And I have had it. Am I astonished that it has come so soon, or did I know it was coming ? " Her eyes drank up the face and the hands and the gestures of her lover. She felt tired, and sat down in the office chair, and he leaned on the desk, and the walls of the cubicle folded them in, even from the inanimate scrutiny of the shop.

## V

They were talking together, half-tearfully, and yet with the confidence of deep mutual trust, in the quick-gathering darkness of the cubicle. And while they were talking, Hilda, in her head, was writing a fervent letter to him : " . . . You see it was so sudden. I had had no chance to tell you. I did so want to tell you, but how could I ? And I hadn't told anybody ! I'm sure you will agree with me that it is best to tell some things as little as possible. And when you had kissed me how could I tell you then—at once ? I could not. It would have spoilt everything. Surely you understand. I know you do, because you understand everything. If I was wrong, tell me where. You don't guess how humble I am ! When I think of you, I am the humblest girl you can imagine. Forgive me, if there is anything to forgive. I don't need to tell you that I have suffered."

And she kept writing the letter again and again, slightly altering the phrases so as to improve them, so as to express herself better and more honestly and more appealingly.

" I shall send you the address to-morrow," she was saying to him. " I shall write you before I go to bed, whether it's to-night or to-morrow morning." She put the fire of her love into the assurance. She smiled to entrance him, and saw on his face that he was beside himself with joy in her. She was a queen, surpassing in her prerogative a thousand elegant Janets. She smiled ; she proudly straightened her shoulders (she the humblest !), and her boy was enslaved.

"I wonder what people will say," he murmured.

She said, with a pang of misgiving about his reception of her letter :

"Please tell no one!" She pleaded that for the present he should tell no one. "Later on, it won't seem so sudden," she added plausibly. "People are so silly."

The sound of another battle in Duck Square awoke them. The shop was very chilly, and quite dark. Their faces were only pale ovals in the blackness. She shivered.

"I must go! I have to pack."

He clasped her : and she was innocently content : she was a young girl again.

"I'll walk up with you," he said protectively.

But she would not allow him to walk up with her, and he yielded. He struck a match. They stumbled out, and, in the midnight of the passage, he took leave of her.

Walking up Trafalgar Road, alone, she was so happy, so amazed, so relieved, so sure of him and of his fineness and of the future, that she could scarcely bear her felicity. It was too intense. . . . At last her life was settled and mapped out. Destiny had been kind, and she meant to be worthy of her fate. She could have swooned, so intoxicant was her wonder and her solemn joy and her yearning after righteousness in love.



## CHAPTER VI

### MISCHANCE

#### I

**T**WELVE days later, in the evening, Hilda stood by the bedside of Sarah Gailey in the basement room of No. 59, Preston Street. There was a bright fire in the grate, and in front of the fire a middle-aged doctor was cleansing the instrument which he had just employed to inject morphia into Sarah's exhausted body. Hilda's assumption that the ageing woman had telegraphed for her on inadequate grounds had proved to be quite wrong.

Upon entering the house on that Thursday night, Hilda, despite the anxious pale face of the new servant who had waited up for her and who entreated her to see Sarah Gailey instantly, had gone first to her own room and scrawled passionately a note to Edwin, which ran : " DEAREST,—This is my address. I love you. Every bit of me is absolutely yours. Write me.—H. L." She gave the letter to the servant to post at once. And as she gave it she had a vision of it travelling in post-office railway vans, and being sorted, and sealed up in a bag, and recovered from the bag, and scanned by the postman at Bursley, and borne up Trafalgar Road by the postman, and dropped into the letter-box at Edwin's house, and finally seized by Edwin ; and of it pleasing him intensely,—for it was a good letter, and she was proud of it because she knew that it was characteristic.

And then, with her mind freed, she had opened the door of Sarah's bedroom. Sarah was unquestionably very ill. Sarah had been quite right in telegraphing so peremptorily to Hilda ; and if she had not so telegraphed she would have been quite wrong. On the previous day she had been sitting on the cold new oilcloth of the topmost stairs, minutely instructing a maid in the craft of polishing banisters. And the

next morning an attack of acute sciatica had supervened. For a trifling indiscretion Sarah was thus condemned to extreme physical torture. Hilda had found her rigid on the bed. She suffered the severest pain in the small of the back and all down the left leg. Her left knee was supported on pillows, and the bedclothes were raised away from it, for it could tolerate no weight whatever. The doctor, who had been and gone, had arranged a system of fomentation and hot-water bottles surpassing anything in even Sarah's experience. And there Sarah lay, not feverish but sweating with agony, terrified to move, terrified to take a deep breath, lest the disturbance of the muscles might produce consequences beyond her strength to endure. She was in no danger of death. She could talk. She could eat and drink. Her pulse was scarcely quickened. But she was degraded and humiliated by mere physical anguish to the condition of a brute. This was her lot in life. All through that first night Hilda stayed with her, trying to pretend that Sarah was a woman, and in the morning she had assumed control of the house.

She had her secret to console her. It remained a secret because there was no one to whom she could relate it. Sarah had no ear for news unconnected with her malady. And indeed to tell Sarah, as Sarah was, would have been to carry callousness to the point of insult. And so Hilda, amid her enormous labours and fatigue, had lived with the secret, which, from being a perfumed delight, turned in two days to something subtly horrible, to something that by its horror prevented her from writing to Edwin aught but the briefest missives. She had existed from hour to hour, from one minute apprehensively to the next, day and night, hardly sleeping, devoured inwardly by a fear at once monstrous and simple, at once convincing and incredible. As for the letter which mentally she had composed a hundred times to Edwin, and which she owed to him, it had become fantastic and then inconceivable to her.

## II

One of the new servants entered the room and handed a letter to Hilda, and left the room and shut the door. The

envelope was addressed "Miss Lessways, 59, Preston Street, Brighton," in Edwin Clayhanger's beautiful handwriting. Every evening came thus a letter, which he had posted in Bursley on the previous day. Hilda thought: "Will this contain another reproach at my irregularity? I can't bear it, if it does." And she gazed at the handwriting, and in particular at her own name, and her own name seemed to be the name of somebody else, of some strange young woman. She felt dizzy. . . . The door of Sarah's wardrobe was ajar, and, in the mirror of it, Hilda could see herself obscurely, a black-robed strange young woman, with untidy hair and white cheeks and huge dark, staring heavy eyes, with pouches beneath them. The image wavered in the mirror. She thought: "Here it is again, this awful feeling! Surely I am not going to faint!" She could hear Sarah's sighing breath: she could hear the singing of the shaded gas-flame. She turned her gaze away from the mirror, and saw Sarah's grey head inadvertently nodding, as it always nodded. Then the letter slipped out of her hand. She glanced down at the floor, in pursuit of it: the floor was darkly revolving. She thought: "Am I really fainting this time? I mustn't faint. I've got to arrange about that bacon to-night and—oh, lots of things! Sarah is not a bit better. And I must sit with her until she gets off to sleep." Her legs trembled, and she was terrorized by extraordinary novel sensations of insecurity. "Oh!" she murmured weakly.

## III

"You've only fainted," said the doctor in a low voice.

She perceived, little by little, that she was lying flat on the floor at the foot of Sarah's bed, and that he was kneeling beside her. The bed threw a shadow on them both, but she could see his benevolent face, anxious and yet reassuring, rather clearly.

"What?" she whispered, in feeble despair. She felt that her resistance was definitely broken.

From higher up, at the level of the hidden bed, came the regular plaintive respiration of Sarah Gailey.

"You must take care of yourself better than this," said the doctor. "Perhaps this is a day when you ought to be resting."

She answered, resigned:

"No, it's not that. I believe I'm going to have a child. You must . . ." She stopped.

"Oh!" said the doctor, with discretion. "Is that it?"

Strange, how the direct words would create a new situation! She had not told the doctor that she had been through the ceremony of marriage, and had been victimized. She had told him nothing but the central and final thought in her mind. And lo! the new situation was brought into being, and the doctor was accepting it! He was not emitting astounded 'buts——!' Her directness had made all possible 'buts' seem ridiculous and futile, and had made the expression of curiosity seem offensive.

She lay on the floor, impassive. She was no longer horrified by expectancy.

"Well," said the doctor, "we must see. I think you can sit up now, can't you?"

Three-quarters of an hour afterwards, she went into Sarah's room alone. She was aware of no emotion whatever. She merely desired, as a professional nurse might have desired, to see if Sarah slept. Sarah was not sleeping. She moaned, as she moaned continually when awake. Hilda bent over her trembling head, whose right side pressed upon the pillow.

"How queer," thought Hilda, "how awful, that she didn't even hear what I said to him! It will almost kill her when she does know."

Sarah's eyes blinked. Without stirring, without shifting her horizontal, preoccupied gaze from the wall, she muttered peevishly:

"What's that you were saying about going to have a child?"

Startled, Hilda moved back a little from the bed.

"The doctor says there's no doubt I am," Hilda answered coldly.

"How queer!" Sarah said. "I quite thought—but of

course, a girl like you are couldn't be sure. I should like another biscuit. But I don't want the Osbornes—the others." She resumed her moaning.

## IV

On the following Saturday morning—rather more than a fortnight after her engagement to Edwin Clayhanger—Hilda came out of the kitchen of No. 59, Preston Street, and shut the door on a nauseating, malodorous mess of broken food and greasy plates, in the midst of which two servants were noisily gobbling down their late breakfast, and disputing. With a frown of disgust on her face, she looked into Sarah Gailey's bedroom. Sarah, though vaguely better, was still in constant acute pain, and her knee still reposed on a pillow, and was protected from the upper bedclothes, and she still could not move. Hilda put on a smile for Sarah Gailey, who nodded morosely, and then, extinguishing the smile, as if it had been expensive gas burning to no purpose, she passed into the basement sitting-room, and slaked the fire there. With a gesture of irresolution, she lifted the lid of the desk in the corner, and gazed first at a little pile of four unopened letters addressed to her in Edwin's handwriting, and then at a volume of Crashaw, which the enthusiastic Tom Orgreave had sent to her as a reward for her appreciation of Crashaw's poems. She released the lid suddenly, and went upstairs to her bedroom, chatting sugarily for an instant on the way with the second Miss Watchett. In the bedroom, she donned her street-things, and then she descended. She had to go to the Registry Office in North Street about a new cook. She stopped at the front door, and then surprisingly went down once more into the basement sitting-room. Standing up at the desk, she wrote this letter: "DARLING JANET,—I am now married to George Cannon. The marriage is not quite public, but I tell you before anybody, and you might tell Edwin Clayhanger.—Your loving H. L." Least said soonest mended! And the conciseness would discourage questioning. She inserted the letter into an envelope, which she addressed and stamped, and then she fled with it from the house, and in two minutes it was in a letter-box, and she



was walking slowly along the King's Road past the shops.

The letter was the swift and desperate sequel to several days' absolutely sterile reflection. It said enough for the moment. Later, she could explain that her husband had left her. She could not write to Edwin. She could not bring herself to write anything to him. She could not confess, nor beg for forgiveness nor even for sympathetic understanding. She could not admit the uninstructed rashness which had led her to assume positively, on inadequate grounds, that her union with George Cannon had been fruitless. She must suffer, and he also must suffer. Rather than let him know, in any conceivable manner, that, all unwitting, she was bearing the child of another at the moment of her betrothal to himself, she preferred to be regarded as a jilt of the very worst kind. Strange that she should choose the rôle of deceiver instead of the rôle of victim! Strange that she would sooner be hated and scorned than pitied! Strange that she would not even give Edwin the opportunity of treating her as a widow! But so it was! For her, the one possible attitude towards Edwin was the attitude of silence. In the silence of the grave her love for him existed.

As she walked along the chill promenade she looked with discreet curiosity at every woman she met, to see her condition. This matter, which before she had never thought of, now obsessed her; and all women were divided for her into two classes, the expectant and the others. Also her self-consciousness was extreme, more so even than it had been after her mother's death. She was not frightened—yet. She was assuredly not panic-struck. Rather her mood was grim, harsh, and calmly bitter. She thought: "I suppose George must be informed." It affected her queerly that if she took it into her head she need never go back to Preston Street. She was free. She owed nothing to anybody. And yet she would go back. She would require a home, soon. And she would require a livelihood, for the shares of the Brighton Hotel Continental Limited promised to be sterile and were already unsaleable. But apart from these considerations, she would have gone back for Sarah Gailey—because Sarah Gailey was entirely dependent on her. She detested Sarah, despite

Sarah's sufferings, and yet by her conscience she was for ever bound to her.

The future loomed appalling. Sarah's career was finished. She could not be anything but a burden and a torment ; her last years would probably be dreadful, both for herself and for others. The prospects of the boarding-house were not radiant. Hilda could direct the enterprise, but not well. She could work, but she had not the art of making others work. Already the place was slightly at sixes and sevens. And she loathed it. She loathed the whole business of catering. Along the entire length of the King's Road, the smells of basement kitchens ascended to the pavement and offended the nose. And Hilda saw all Brighton as a colossal and disgusting enlargement of the kitchen at No. 59. She saw the background and the pits of Brighton—that which underlies and hides behind, and is not seen. The grandeur of the King's Road was naught to her. Her glance pierced it and it faded to an hallucination. Beyond it she envisaged the years to come, the messy and endless struggle, the necessary avarice and trickeries incidental to it,—and perhaps the ultimate failure. She would never make money—she felt that ! She was not born to make money—especially by dodges and false politeness, out of idle, empty-noddled boarders. She would lose it and lose it. And she pictured what she would be in ten years : the hard-driven landlady, up to every subterfuge, —with a child to feed and educate, and perhaps a bedridden, querulous invalid to support. And there was no alternative to the tableau.

She went by the Chichester, which towered with all its stories above her head. Who would take it now ? George Cannon would have made it pay. He would have made anything pay. How ? . . . She was definitely cut off from the magnificence of the King's Road. The side-street was her destiny ; the side-street and shabbiness. And it was all George's fault—and hers ! The poverty, if it came, would be George's fault alone. For he had squandered her money in a speculation. It astounded her that George, so shrewd and well balanced, should have made an investment so foolish. She did not realize that a passion for a business enterprise, as for a woman, is capable of destroying the balance

of any man. And George Cannon had had both passions.

And then she saw Florrie Bagster, on the other side of the street, walking leisurely by the sea-wall, alone. If Mr. Boutwood had had a more generous and wild disposition he might have allowed Florrie to ruin him in six months of furs and carriages and champagne. But Mr. Boutwood, though a dog, was a careful dog, especially at those moments when the conventional dog can refuse nothing. Florrie was well and warmly dressed,—no more; and she was on foot. Hilda's gaze fastened on her, and immediately divined from the cut and fall of the coat that Florrie had something to conceal from every one but her Mr. Boutwood. And whereas Florrie trod the pavement with a charming little air that wavered between impudence and modesty, between timid meekness and conceit, Hilda blushed with shame and pity. She on one footpath, and Florrie on the other!

"Soon," she thought, "I shall not be able to walk along this road!"

She had sinned. She admitted that she had sinned against some quality in herself. But how innocently and how ignorantly! And what a tremendous punishment for so transient a weakness! And new consequences, still more disastrous than any she had foreseen, presented themselves one after another. George had escaped, but a word of open scandal, a single whisper in the ear of the old creature down at Torquay, might actuate machinery that would reach out after him and drag him back, and plant him in jail. George, the father of her child, in jail! It was all a matter of chance—sheer chance! She began to perceive what life really was, and the immense importance of hazard therein. Nevertheless, without frailty, without defection, what could chance have done? She began to perceive that this that she was living through was life. She bit her lips. Grief! Shame! Disillusion! Hardship! Peril! Catastrophe! Exile! Above all, exile! These had to be faced, and they would be faced. She recalled the fieriest verse of Crashaw, and she set her shoulders back. There was the stuff of a woman in her. . . . Only a little while, and she had seen before her a beloved boy entranced by her charm. She had now no charm. Where now was the soft virgin? . . . And yet, somehow, magically, miraculously,

the soft virgin was still there ! And the invincible vague hope of youth, and the irrepressible consciousness of power, were almost ready to flame up afresh, contrary to all reason, and irradiate her starless soul.

# THE CLAYHANGER FAMILY

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## III. THESE TWAIN

### BOOK I

### THE WOMAN IN THE HOUSE

#### CHAPTER I

#### THE HOUSE

#### I

**I**N the year 1892 Bleakridge, residential suburb of Bursley, was still most plainly divided into old and new,—that is to say, into the dull red or dull yellow with stone facings, and the bright red with terra-cotta gim-crackery. Like incompatible liquids congealed in a pot, the two components had run into each other and mingled, but never mixed.

Paramount among the old was the house of the Member of Parliament, near the top of the important mound that separates Hanbridge from Bursley. The aged and widowed Member used the house little, but he kept it up, and sometimes came into it with an unexpectedness that extremely flattered the suburb. Thus you might be reading in the morning paper that the Member had given a lunch in London on the previous day to Cabinet Ministers and ladies as splendid as the Countess of Chell, and—glancing out of the window—you might see the Member himself walking down Trafalgar Road, sad, fragile, sedately alert, with his hands behind him, or waving a gracious hand to an acquaintance. Whereupon you would announce, not apathetically: “Member’s gone down to MacIlvaine’s!” (MacIlvaine’s being the works in which the Member had an interest) and there would perhaps



be a rush to the window. Those were the last great days of Bleakridge.

After the Member's house ranked such historic residences as those of Osmond Orgreave, the architect (which had the largest, greenest garden and the best smoke-defying trees in Bleakridge), and Fearn, the Hanbridge lawyer; together with Manor 'Cottage' (so called, though a spacious house), where lived the mechanical genius who had revolutionized the pottery industry and strangely enough made a fortune thereby, and the dark abode of the High Church parson.

Next in importance came the three terraces,—Manor Terrace, Abbey Terrace, and Sneyd Terrace,—each consisting of three or four houses, and all on the west side of Trafalgar Road, with long back gardens and a distant prospect of Hillport therefrom over the Manor fields. The terraces, considered as architecture, were unbeautiful, old-fashioned, inconvenient, perhaps paltry, as may be judged from the fact that rents ran as low as £25 a year; but they had been wondrous in their day, the pride of builders and owners and the marvel of a barbaric populace. They, too, had histories, which many people knew. Age had softened them and sanctioned their dignity. A gate might creak, but the harsh curves of its ironwork had been mollified by time. Moreover the property was always maintained in excellent repair by its landlords, and residents cared passionately for the appearance of the windows and the front steps. The plenary respectability of the residents could not be impugned. They were as good as the best. For address, they would not give the number of the house in Trafalgar Road, but the name of its terrace. Just as much as the occupiers of detached houses, they had sorted themselves out from the horde. Conservative or Liberal, they were anti-democratic, ever murmuring to themselves as they descended the front steps in the morning and mounted them in the evening: "Most folks are nobodies, but I am somebody." And this was true.

The still smaller old houses in between the terraces, and even the old cottages in the side streets (which all ran to the east), had a similar distinction of caste, aloofness, and tradition. The least of them was scornful of the crowd, and deeply conscious of itself as a separate individuality. When the

tenant-owner of a cottage in Manor Street added a bay-window to his front room the event seemed enormous in Manor Street, and affected even Trafalgar Road, as a notorious clean-shaven figure in the streets may disconcert a whole quarter by growing a beard. The congeries of cottage yards between Manor Street and Higginbotham Street, as visible from certain high back bedrooms in Trafalgar Road,—a crowded higgledy-piggledy of plum-coloured walls and chimneys, blue-brick pavements, and slate roofs,—well illustrated the grand Victorian epoch of the Building Society, when eighteenpence was added weekly to eighteenpence, and land haggled over by the foot, and every brick counted, in the grim, long effort to break away from the mass.

The traditionalism of Bleakridge protected even Roman Catholicism in that district of Nonconformity, where there were at least three Methodist chapels to every church and where the adjective 'popish' was commonly used in preference to 'papal.' The little 'Catholic Chapel' and the priest's house with its cross-keys at the top of the mound were as respected as any other buildings, because Roman Catholicism had always been endemic there, since the age when the entire hamlet belonged to Cistercian monks in white robes. A feebly endemic Catholicism and a complete exemption from tithes were all that remained of the Cistercian occupation. The exemption was highly esteemed by the possessing class.

Alderman Sutton, towards the end of the seventies, first pitted the new against the old in Bleakridge. The lifelong secretary of a first-class Building Society, he was responsible for a terrace of three commodious modern residences exactly opposite the house of the Member. The Member and Osmond Orgreave might modernize their antique houses as much as they liked,—they could never match the modernity of the Alderman's terrace, to which, by the way, he declined to give a name. He was capable of covering his drawing-room walls with papers at 3s. 6d. a roll, and yet he capriciously preferred numbers to a name! These houses cost £1,200 each (a lot of money in the happy far-off days when good bricks were only £1 a thousand, or a farthing apiece), and imposed themselves at once upon the respect and admiration of Bleak-

ridge. A year or two later the Clayhanger house went up at the corner of Trafalgar Road and Hulton Street, and easily outvied the Sutton houses. Geographically at the centre of the residential suburb, it represented the new movement in Bleakridge at its apogee, and indeed was never beaten by later ambitious attempts.

Such fine erections, though nearly every detail of them challenged tradition, could not disturb Bleakridge's belief in the stability of society. But simultaneously whole streets of cheap small houses (in reality, pretentious cottages) rose round about. Hulton Street was all new and cheap. Oak Street offered a row of pink cottages to Osmond Orgreave's garden gates, and there were three other similar new streets between Oak Street and the Catholic Chapel. Jerry-building was practised in Trafalgar Road itself, on a large plot in full view of the Catholic Chapel, where a speculative builder, too hurried to use a measure, 'stepped out' the foundations of fifteen cottages with his own bandy legs, and when the corner of a freshly-constructed cottage fell into the street remarked that accidents would happen and had the bricks replaced. But not every cottage was jerry-built. Many, perhaps most, were of fairly honest workmanship. All were modern and relatively spacious, and much superior in plan to the old. All had bay-windows. And yet all their bay-windows together could not produce an effect equal to one bay-window in ancient Manor Street, because they had omitted to be individual. Not one showy dwelling was unlike another, nor desired to be unlike another.

The garish new streets were tenanted by magic. On Tuesday the paperhangers might be whistling in those drawing-rooms (called parlours in Manor Street),—on Wednesday bay-windows were curtained and chimneys smoking. And just as the cottages lacked individuality, so the tenants were nobodies. At any rate no traditional person in Bleakridge knew who they were, nor where they came from, except that they came mysteriously up out of the town. (Not that there had been any shocking increase in the birth-rate down there !) And no traditional person seemed to care. The strange in-road and portent ought to have puzzled and possibly to have intimidated traditional Bleakridge : but it did not. Bleak-

ridge merely observed that 'a lot of building was going on,' and left the phenomenon at that. At first it was interested and flattered; then somewhat resentful and regretful. And even Edwin Clayhanger, though he counted himself among the enlightened and the truly democratic, felt hurt when quite nice houses, copying some features of his own on a small scale, and let to such people as insurance agents, began to fill up the remaining empty spaces of Trafalgar Road. He could not help thinking that the prestige of Bleakridge was being impaired.

## II

Edwin Clayhanger, though very young in marriage, considered that he was getting on in years as a householder. His age was thirty-six. He had been married only a few months, under peculiar circumstances which rendered him self-conscious, and on an evening of August, 1892, as he stood in the hall of his house awaiting the commencement of a postponed and unusual At Home, he felt absurdly nervous. But the nervousness was not painful; because he himself could laugh at it. He might be timid, he might be a little gawky, he might often have the curious sensation of not being really adult but only a boy after all,—the great impressive facts would always emerge that he was the respected head of a well-known family, that he was successful, that he had both ideas and money, and that his position as one of the two chief master-printers of the district would not be challenged. He knew that he could afford to be nervous. And further, since he was house-proud, he had merely to glance round his house in order to be reassured and puffed up.

Loitering near the foot of the stairs, discreetly stylish in an almost new blue serge suit and a quite new black satin tie, with the light of the gas on one side of his face, and the twilight through the glazed front door mitigating the shadow on the other, Edwin mused pleasingly upon the whole organism of his home. Externally, the woodwork and metalwork of the house had just been repainted, and the brickwork pointed. He took pleasure in the thought of the long even lines of fresh mortar, and of the new sage-tinted spoutings and pipings, every foot of which he knew by heart and where every tube

began and where it ended and what its purpose was. The nice fitting of a perpendicular spout into a horizontal one, and the curve of the joint from the eave to the wall of the house, and the elaborate staples that firmly held the spout to the wall, and the final curve of the spout that brought its orifice accurately over a spotless grid in the ground,—the perfection of all these ridiculous details, each beneath the notice of a truly celestial mind, would put the householder Edwin into a sort of contemplative ecstasy. Perhaps he was comical. But such inner experiences were part of his great interest in life, part of his large general passion.

Within the hall he regarded with equal interest and pride the photogravure of Bellini's "Agony in the Garden," from the National Gallery, and the radiator which he had just had installed. The radiator was only a half-measure, but it was his precious toy, his pet lamb, his mistress; and the theory of it was that by warming the hall and the well of the staircase it softly influenced the whole house and abolished draughts. He had exaggerated the chilliness of the late August night so that he might put the radiator into action. About the small furnace in the cellar that heated it he was both crotchety and extravagant. The costly efficiency of the radiator somewhat atoned in his mind for the imperfections of the hot-water apparatus, depending on the kitchen boiler. Even in 1892 this middle-class pioneer and sensualist was dreaming of an ideal house in which inexhaustible water was always positively steaming, so that if a succession of persons should capriciously desire hot baths in the cold middle of the night, their collective fancy might be satisfied.

Bellini's picture was the symbol of an artistic revolution in Edwin. He had read somewhere that it was "perhaps the greatest picture in the world." A critic's exhortation to "observe the loving realistic passion shown in the foreshortening of the figure of the sleeping apostle" had remained in his mind; and, thrilled, he would point out this feature of the picture alike to the comprehending and the uncomprehending. The hanging-up of the Bellini, in its strange frame of stained unpolished oak, had been an epochal event, closing one era and inaugurating another. And yet, before the event, he had not even noticed the picture on a visit to the National Gallery!



A hint, a phrase murmured in the right tone in a periodical, a glimpse of an illustration,—and the mighty magic seed was sown. In a few months all Victorian phenomena had been put upon their trial, and most of them condemned. And condemned without even the forms of justice! Half a word (in the right tone) might ruin any of them. Thus was Sir Frederick Leighton, P.R.A., himself overthrown. One day his “Bath of Psyche” reigned in Edwin’s bedroom, and the next it had gone, and none knew why. But certain aged Victorians, such as Edwin’s Auntie Hamps, took the disappearance of the licentious engraving as a sign that the beloved queer Edwin was at last coming to his senses—as, of course, they knew he ultimately would. He did not and could not explain. More and more he was growing to look upon his house as an island, cut off by a difference of manners from the varnished barbarism of multitudinous new cottages, and by an immensely more profound difference of thought from both the cottages and the larger houses. It seemed astounding to Edwin that modes of thought so violently separative as his and theirs could exist so close together and under such appearances of similarity. Not even all the younger members of the Orgreave family, who counted as his nearest friends, were esteemed by Edwin to be meet for his complete candour.

The unique island was scarcely a dozen years old, but historical occurrences had aged it for Edwin. He had opened the doors of all three reception-rooms, partly to extend the benign sway of the radiator, and partly so that he might judge the total effect of the illuminated chambers and improve that effect if possible. And each room bore the mysterious imprints of past emotion.

In the drawing-room, with its new orange-coloured gas-globes that gilded everything beneath them, Edwin’s father used to sit on Sunday evenings, alone. And one Sunday evening, when Edwin, entering, had first mentioned to his father a woman’s name, his father had most terribly humiliated him. But now it seemed as if some other youth, and not Edwin, had been humiliated, so completely was the wound healed. . . . And he could remember leaning in the doorway of the drawing-room one Sunday morning, and his sister Clara was seated at the piano, and his sister Maggie, nursing a baby of

Clara's, by her side, and they were singing Balfe's duet "Excelsior," and his father stood behind them, crying, crying steadily, until at length the bitter old man lost control of himself and sobbed aloud under the emotional stress of the women's voices, and Clara cheerfully upbraided him for foolishness; and Edwin had walked suddenly away. This memory was somehow far more poignant than the memory of his humiliation. . . . And in the drawing-room, too, he had finally betrothed himself to Hilda. That by comparison was only yesterday; yet it was historical and distant. He was wearing his dressing-gown, being convalescent from influenza; he could distinctly recall the feel of his dressing-gown; and Hilda came in—over her face was a veil. . . .

The dining-room, whose large glistening table was now covered with the most varied and modern 'refreshments' for the At Home, had witnessed no event specially dramatic, but it had witnessed hundreds of monotonous tragic meals at which the progress of his father's mental malady and the approach of his death could be measured by the old man's increasing disability to distinguish between his knife and his fork; it had seen Darius Clayhanger fed like a baby. And it had never been the same dining-room since. Edwin might transform it, repaper it, refurnish it,—the mysterious imprint remained. . . .

And then there was the little 'breakfast-room,' inserted into the plan of the house between the hall and the kitchen. Nothing had happened there, because the life of the household had never adjusted itself to the new, borrowed convention of the 'breakfast-room.' Nothing? But the most sensational thing had happened there! When, with an exquisite passing timidity, she took possession of Edwin's house as his wife, Hilda had had a sudden gust of audacity in the breakfast-room. A mature woman (with a boy aged ten to prove it), she had effervesced into the naïve gestures of a young girl who has inherited a boudoir. "This shall be my very own room, and I shall arrange it just how I like, without asking you about *anything*. And it will be my very own." She had not offered an idea; she had announced a decision. Edwin had had other notions for the room, but he perceived that he must bury them in eternal silence, and yield eagerly to this

caprice. Thus to acquiesce had given him deep and strange joy.

He was startled, perhaps, to discover that he had brought into his house—not a woman, but a tripartite creature—woman, child, and sibyl. Neither Maggie nor Clara, nor Janet Orgreave, nor even Hilda before she became his wife, had ever aroused in him the least suspicion that a woman might be a tripartite creature. He was married, certainly—nobody could be more legally and respectably married than was he—but the mere marriage seemed naught in comparison with the enormous fact that he had got this unexampled creature in his house and was living with her, she at his mercy, and he at hers. Enchanting escapade! Solemn doom! . . . By the way, she had yet done nothing with the breakfast-room. Yes, she had stolen a ‘cabinet’ gold frame from the shop, and put his photograph into it, and stuck his picture on the mantelpiece; but that was all. She would not permit him to worry her about her secret designs for the breakfast-room. The breakfast-room was her affair. Indeed the whole house was her affair. It was no longer his house, in which he could issue orders without considering another individuality—orders that would infallibly be executed, either cheerfully or glumly, by the plump spinster, Maggie. He had to mind his p’s and q’s; he had to be wary, everywhere. The creature did not simply live in the house; she pervaded it. As soon as he opened the front-door he felt her.

### III

She was now upstairs in their joint bedroom, dressing for the At Home. All day he had feared she might be late, and as he looked at the hall-clock he saw that the risk was getting acute.

Before the domestic rearrangements preceding the marriage had been fully discussed, he had assumed, and Maggie and Clara had assumed, and Auntie Hamps had absolutely assumed, that the husband and wife would occupy the long-empty bedroom of old Darius, because it was two-foot-six broader than Edwin’s, and because it was the ‘principal’ bedroom. But Hilda had said ‘No’ to him privately. Whereupon, being himself almost morbidly unsentimental, he had judi-

ciously hinted that to object to a room because an old man had died in it under distressing circumstances was to be morbidly sentimental and unworthy of her. Whereupon she had mysteriously smiled, and called him sweet bad names, and kissed him, and hung on his neck. *She* sentimental! Could not the great stupid see without being told that what influenced her was not an aversion for his father's bedroom, but a predilection for Edwin's? She desired that they should inhabit *his* room. She wanted to sleep in *his* room; and to wake up in it, and to feel that she was immersing herself in his past. . . . (Ah! The exciting flattery, like an aphrodisiac!) And she would not allow him to uproot the fixed bookcases on either side of the hearth. She said that for her they were part of the room itself. Useless to argue that they occupied space required for extra furniture! She would manage! She did manage. He found that the acme of convenience for a husband had not been achieved, but convenience was naught in the rapture of the escapade. He had 'needed shaking up,' as they say down there, and he was shaken up.

Nevertheless, though undoubtedly shaken up, he had the male wit to perceive that the bedroom episode had been a peculiar triumph for himself. Her attitude in it, imperious superficially, was in truth an impassioned and outright surrender to him. And further, she had at once become a frankly admiring partisan of his theory of bedrooms. The need for a comfortable solitude earlier in life had led Edwin to make his bedroom habitable by means of a gas-stove, an easy chair, and minor amenities. When teased by hardy compatriots about his sybaritism, Edwin was apt sometimes to flush and be 'nettled,' and he would make offensive un-English comments upon the average bedroom of the average English household, which was so barbaric that during eight months of the year you could not maintain your temperature in it unless you were either in the bed or running about the room, and that even in summer you could not sit down therein at ease because there was nothing easy to sit on, nor a table to sit at, nor even a book to read. He would caustically ask to be informed why the supposedly practical and comfort-loving English were content with an Alpine hut for a bed-

room. And in this way he would go on. He was rather pleased with the phrase 'Alpine hut.' One day he had overheard Hilda replying to an acquaintance upstairs: "People may say what they like, but Edwin and I don't care to sleep in an Alpine hut." She had caught it! She was his disciple in that matter! And how she had appreciated his easy-chair! And as for calm deliberation in dressing and undressing, she could astonishingly and even disconcertingly surpass him in the quality. But it is to be noted that she would not permit her son to have a gas-stove in his bedroom. Nor would she let him occupy the disdained principal bedroom, her argument being that that room was too large for a little boy. Maggie Clayhanger's old bedroom was given to George, and the principal bedroom remained empty.



## CHAPTER II

### HILDA ON THE STAIRS

#### I

ADA descended the stairs, young, slim, very neat. Ada was one of Hilda's two new servants. Before taking charge of the house Hilda had ordained the operation called 'a clean sweep,' and Edwin had approved. The elder of Maggie's two servants had been a good one, but Hilda had shown no interest in the catalogue of her excellences. She wanted fresh servants. Maggie, like Edwin, approved, but only as a general principle. In the particular case she had hinted that her prospective sister-in-law was perhaps unwise to let slip a tested servant. Hilda wanted not merely fresh servants, but young servants agreeable to behold. "I will not have a lot of middle-aged scowling women about my house," Hilda had said. Maggie was reserved, but her glance was meant to remind Hilda that in those end-of-the-century days, mistresses had to be content with what they could get. Young and comely servants were all very well—if you could drop on them, but supposing you couldn't? The fact was that Maggie could not understand Hilda's insistence on youth and comeliness in a servant, and she foresaw trouble for Hilda. Hilda, however, obtained her desire. She was outspoken with her servants. If Edwin, after his manner, implied that she was dangerously ignoring the touchiness of the modern servant, she would say indifferently: "It's always open to them to go if they don't like it." They did not go. It is notorious that foolhardy mistresses are often very lucky.

As soon as Ada caught sight of her master in the hall she became self-conscious; all the joints of her body seemed to be hung on very resilient springs, and, reddening slightly, she lowered her gaze and looked at her tripping toes. Edwin

seldom spoke to her more than once a day, and not always that. He had one day visited the large attic into which, with her colleague, she disappeared late at night, and from which she emerged early in the morning, and he had seen two small tin trunks and some clothes behind the door, and an alarm-clock and a portrait of a fireman on the mantelpiece. (The fireman, he seemed to recollect, was her brother.) But she was a stranger in his house, and he had no sustained curiosity about her. The days were gone when he used to be the intimate of servants—of Mrs. Nixon, for example, sole prop of the Clayhanger family for many years, and an entirely human being to Edwin. Mrs. Nixon had never been either young, slim, or neat. She was dead. The last servant whom he could be said to have known was a pert niece of Mrs. Nixon's—now somebody's prolific wife and much changed. And he was now somebody's husband, and bearded, and perhaps occasionally pompous, and much changed in other ways. So that enigmatic Adas bridled at sight of him and became intensely aware of themselves. Still, this Ada in her smartness was a pretty sight for his eyes as like an aspen she trembled down the stairs, though the coarseness of her big red hands, and the vulgarity of her accent were a surprising contrast to her waist and her fine carriage.

He knew she had been hooking her mistress's dress, and that therefore the hooking must be finished. He liked to think of Hilda being attired thus in the bedroom by a natty deferential wench. The process gave to Hilda a luxurious, even an Oriental quality, which charmed him. He liked the suddenly impressive tone in which the haughty Hilda would say to Ada, "Your master," as if mentioning a sultan.

He was more and more anxious lest Hilda should be late, and he wanted to ask Ada :

"Is Mrs. Clayhanger coming down?"

But he discreetly forbore. He might have run up to the bedroom and burst in on the toilette—Hilda would have welcomed him. But he preferred to remain with his anxiety where he was, and meditate upon Hilda bedecking herself up there in the bedroom—to please him ; to please not the guests, but him.

Ada disappeared down the narrow passage leading to the

kitchen, and a moment later he heard a crude giggle, almost a scream, and some echo of the rough tones in which the servants spoke to each other when they were alone in the kitchen. There were in fact two Adas ; one was as timid as a fawn with a voice like a delicate invalid's ; the other a loud-mouthed hoity-toity girl such as rushed out of potbanks in flannel apron at one o'clock. The Clayhanger servants were satisfactory, more than satisfactory, the subject of favourable comment for their neatness among the mistresses of other servants. He liked them to be about ; their presence and their official demeanour flattered him ; they perfected the complex superiority of his house,—that island. But when he overheard them alone together, or when he set himself to imagine what their soul's life was, he was more than ever amazed at the unnoticed profound differences between modes of thought that in apparently the most natural manner could exist so close together without producing a cataclysm. Auntie Hamps's theory was that they were all—he, she, the servants—equal in the sight of God !

## II

Hilda's son, George Edwin, sidled surprisingly into the hall. He was wearing a sailor suit, very new, and he had probably been invisible somewhere against the blue curtains of the drawing-room window—an example of nature's protective mimicry. George was rather small for his ten years. Dark, like his mother, he had her eyes and her thick eyebrows that almost met in the middle, and her pale skin. As for his mind, he seemed to be sometimes alarmingly precocious and sometimes a case of arrested development. In this and many other respects he greatly resembled other boys. The son of a bigamist can have no name, unless it be his mother's maiden name, but George knew nothing of that. He had borne his father's name, and when at the exciting and puzzling period of his mother's marriage he had learnt that his surname would in future be Clayhanger he had a little resented the affront to his egoism. Edwin's explanation, however, that the change was for the convenience of people in general had caused him to shrug his shoulders in concession and to murmur casually : " Oh, well then—— ! " He seemed to be assent-

ing with loftiness : " If it's any particular use to the whole world, I don't really mind."

" I say, uncle," he began.

Edwin had chosen this form of address. ' Stepfather ' was preposterous, and ' father ' somehow offended him ; so he constituted himself an uncle.

" Hello, kid ! " said he. " Can you find room to keep anything else in your pockets besides your hands ? "

George snatched his hands out of his pockets. Then he smiled confidently up. These two were friends. Edwin was as proud as the boy of the friendship, and perhaps more flattered. At first he had not cared for George, being repelled by George's loud, positive tones, his brusque and often violent gestures, and his intense absorption in himself. But gradually he had been won by the boy's boyishness, his smile, his little, soft body, his unspoken invocations, his resentment of injustice (except when strict justice appeared to clash with his own interests), his absolute impotence against adult decrees, his touching fatalism, his recondite personal distinction that flashed and was gone, and his occasional cleverness and wit. He admitted that George charmed him. But he well knew that he also charmed George. He had a way of treating George as an equal that few children (save possibly Clara's) could have resisted. True, he would quiz the child, but he did not forbid the child to quiz. The mother was profoundly relieved and rejoiced by this friendship. She luxuriated in it. Edwin might well have been inimical to the child ; he might through the child have shown a jealousy of the child's father. But, somewhat to the astonishment of even Edwin himself, he never saw the father in the child, nor thought of the father, nor resented the parenthood that was not his. For him the child was an individual. And in spite of his stern determination not to fall into the delusions of conceited parents, he could not help thinking that George was a remarkable child.

" Have you seen my horse ? " asked George.

" Have I seen your horse ? . . . Oh ! . . . I've seen that you've left it lying about on the hall-table."

" I put it there so that you'd see it," George persuasively excused himself for the untidiness.

"Well, let's inspect it," Edwin forgave him, and picked up from the table a piece of cartridge-paper on which was a drawing of a great cart-horse with shaggy feet. It was a vivacious sketch.

"You're improving," said Edwin, judicially, but in fact much impressed. Surely few boys of ten could draw as well as that ! The design was strangely more mature than certain quite infantile water-colours that Edwin had seen scarcely a year earlier.

"It's rather good, isn't it ?" George suggested, lifting up his head so that he could just see over the edge of the paper which Edwin held at the level of his watch-chain.

"I've met worse. Where did you see this particular animal ?"

"I saw him down near the Brewery this morning. But when I'm doing a horse, I see him on the paper before I begin to draw, and I just draw round him."

Edwin thought :

"This kid is no ordinary kid."

He said :

"Well, we'll pin it up here. We'll have a Royal Academy and hear what the public has to say." He took a pin from under his waistcoat.

"That's not level," said George.

And when Edwin had readjusted the pin, George persisted boldly :

"That's not level either."

"It's as level as it's going to be. I expect you've been drawing horses instead of practising your piano."

He looked down at the mysterious little boy, who lived always so much nearer to the earth's surface than himself.

George nodded simply, and then scratched his head.

"I suppose if I don't practise while I'm young I shall regret it in after life, shan't I ?"

"Who told you that ?"

"It's what Auntie Hamps said to me, I think. . . . I say, uncle."

"What's up ?"

"Is Mr. John coming to-night ?"

"I suppose so. Why ?"



"Oh, nothing. . . . I say, uncle."

"That's twice you've said it."

The boy smiled.

"You know that piece in the Bible about if two of you shall agree on earth——?"

"What of it?" Edwin asked rather curtly, anticipating difficulties.

"I don't think two *boys* would be enough, would it? Two grown-ups might. But I'm not so sure about two boys. You see in the very next verse it says two *or three*, gathered together."

"Three might be more effective. It's always as well to be on the safe side."

"Could you pray for anything? A penknife, for instance?"

"Why not?"

"But could you?" George was a little impatient.

"Better ask your mother," said Edwin, who was becoming self-conscious under the strain.

George exploded coarsely:

"Poh! It's no good asking mother."

Said Edwin:

"The great thing in these affairs is to know what you want, and to *want* it. Concentrate as hard as you can a long time in advance. No use half wanting!"

"Well, there's one thing that's *poz* [positive]. I couldn't begin to concentrate to-night."

"Why not?"

"Who could?" George protested. "We're all so nervous to-night, aren't we, with this At Home business? And I know I never could concentrate in my best clothes."

For Edwin the boy with his shocking candour had suddenly precipitated out of the atmosphere, as it were, the collective nervousness of the household, made it into a phenomenon visible, tangible, oppressive. And the household was no longer a collection of units, but an entity. A bell rang faintly in the kitchen, and the sound abraded his nerves. The first guests were on the threshold, and Hilda was late. He looked at the clock. Yes, she was late. The hour named in the invitations was already past. All day he had feared lest she should be late, and she was late. He looked at the glass of

the front-door ; but night had come, and it was opaque. Ada tripped into view and ran upstairs.

" Don't you hear the front-door ? " he stopped her flight.

" It was missis's bell, sir."

" Ah ! " Respite !

Ada disappeared.

Then another ring ! And no parlourmaid to answer the bell ! Naturally ! Naturally Hilda, forgetting something at the last moment, had taken the parlourmaid away precisely when the girl was needed ! Oh ! He had foreseen it ! He could hear shuffling outside and could even distinguish forms through the glass—many forms. All the people converging from various streets upon the waiting nervousness of the household seemed to have arrived at once.

George moved impulsively towards the front-door.

" Where are you going ? " Edwin asked roughly. " Come here. It's not your place to open the door. Come with me in the drawing-room."

It was no affair of Edwin's, thought Edwin crossly and uncompromisingly, if guests were kept waiting at the front-door. It was Hilda's affair ; she was the mistress of the house, and the blame was hers.

At high speed Ada swept with streamers down the stairs, like a squirrel down the branch of a tree. And then came Hilda.

### III

She stood at the turn of stairs, waiting while the front-door was opened. He and George could see her over and through the banisters. And at sight of her triumphant and happy air, all Edwin's annoyance melted. He did not desire that it should melt, but it melted. She was late. He could not rely on her not to be late. In summoning the parlourmaid to her bedroom when the parlourmaid ought to have been on duty downstairs she had acted indefensibly and without thought. No harm, as it happened, was done. Sheer chance often thus saved her, but logically her double fault was not thereby mitigated. He felt that if he forgave her, if he dismissed the charge and wiped the slate, he was being false to the great male principles of logic and justice. The godlike

judge in him resented the miscarriage of justice. Nevertheless justice miscarried. And the weak husband said like a woman: "What does it matter?" Such was her shameful power over him, of which the unscrupulous creature was quite aware.

As he looked at her he asked himself: "Is she magnificent? Or is she just ordinary and am I deluded? Does she seem her age? Is she a mature woman getting past the prime, or has she miraculously kept herself a young girl for me?"

In years she was thirty-five. She had large bones, and her robust body, neither plump nor slim, showed the firm, assured carriage of its age. It said: "I have stood before the world, and I cannot be intimidated." Still, marriage had rejuvenated her. She was marvellously young at times, and experience would drop from her and leave the girl that he had first known and kissed ten years earlier; but a less harsh, less uncompromising girl. At their first acquaintance she had repelled him with her truculent seriousness. Nowadays she would laugh for no apparent reason, and even pirouette. Her complexion was good; he could nearly persuade himself that that olive skin had not suffered in a decade of distress and disasters.

Previous to her marriage she had shown little interest in dress. But now she would spasmodically worry about her clothes, and she would make Edwin worry. He had to decide, though he had no qualifications as an arbiter. She would scowl at a dressmaker as if to say: "For God's sake do realize that upon you is laid the sacred responsibility of helping me to please my husband!" To-night she was wearing a striped blue dress, imperceptibly *décolletée*, with the leg-of-mutton sleeves of the period. The colours, two shades of blue, did not suit her. But she imagined that they suited her, and so did he; and the frock was elaborate, was the result of terrific labour and produced a rich effect, meet for a hostess of position.

The mere fact that this woman with no talent for coquetry should after years of narrow insufficiency scowl at dressmakers and pout at senseless refractory silks in the yearning for elegance was utterly delicious to Edwin. Her presence there on the landing of the stairs was in the nature of a miracle.

He had wanted her, and he had got her. In the end he had got her, and nothing had been able to stop him—not even the obstacle of her tragic adventure with a rascal and a bigamist. The strong magic of his passion had forced destiny to render her up to him mysteriously intact, after all. The impossible had occurred, and society had accepted it, beaten. There she was, dramatically, with her thick eyebrows, and the fine wide nostrils and the delicate lobe of the ear, and that mouth that would startlingly fasten on him and kiss the life out of him.

“There is dear Hilda!” said some one at the door amid the arriving group.

None but Auntie Hamps would have said ‘dear’ Hilda. Maggie, Clara, and even Janet Orgreave never used sentimental adjectives on occasions of ceremony.

And in her clear, precise, dominating voice Hilda with gay ease greeted the company from above:

“Good evening, all!”

“What the deuce was I so upset about just now?” thought Edwin, in sudden, instinctive, exulting felicity: “Everything is absolutely all right.”

### CHAPTER III

#### ATTACK AND REPULSE

##### I

THE entering guests were Edwin's younger sister Clara with her husband Albert Benbow, his elder sister Maggie, Auntie Hamps, and Mr. Peartree. They had arrived together, and rather unfashionably soon after the hour named in the invitation, because the Benbows had called at Auntie Hamps's on the way up, and the Benbows were always early, both in arriving and in departing, 'on account of the children.' They called themselves 'early birds.' Whenever they were out of the nest in the evening they called themselves early birds. They used the comparison hundreds, thousands, of times, and never tired of it; indeed each time they were convinced that they had invented it freshly for the occasion.

Said Auntie Hamps, magnificent in jetty black, handsome, and above all imposing:

"I knew you would be delighted to meet Mr. Peartree again, Edwin. He is staying the night at my house—I can be so much more hospitable now Maggie is with me—and I insisted he should come up with us. But it needed no insisting."

The old erect lady looked from Mr. Peartree with pride towards her nephew.

Mr. Peartree was a medium-sized man of fifty, with greying sandy hair. Twenty years before, he had been second minister in the Bursley Circuit of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion. He was now superintendent minister in a Cheshire circuit. The unchangeable canons of Wesleyanism permit its ministers to marry, and celibacy is even discouraged, for the reason that wives and daughters are expected to toil in the cause, and their labour costs the circuit not a halfpenny.



But the canons forbid ministers to take root and found a home. Eleven times in thirty years Mr. Peartree had been forced to migrate to a strange circuit and to adapt his much-travelled furniture and family to a house which he had not chosen, and which his wife generally did not like. During part of the period he had secretly resented the autocracy of Superintendent Ministers, and during the remainder he had learnt that Superintendent Ministers are not absolute autocrats.

He was neither overworked nor underpaid. He belonged to the small tradesman class, and, keeping a shop in St. Luke's Square, he might well have worked harder for less money than he now earned. His vocation, however, in addition to its desolating nomadic quality, had other grave drawbacks. It gave him contact with a vast number of human beings, but the abnormal proportion among them of visionaries, bigots, hypocrites, and petty office-seekers falsified his general estimate of humanity. Again, the canons rigorously forbade him to think freely for himself on the subjects which in theory most interested him ; with the result that he had remained extremely ignorant through the very fear of knowledge, that he was a warm enemy of freedom, and that he habitually carried intellectual dishonesty to the verge of cynicism. Thirdly, he was obliged always to be diplomatic (except of course with his family), and nature had not meant him for the diplomatic career. He was so sick of being all things to all men that he even dreamed diplomatic dreams as a galley-slave will dream of the oar ; and so little gifted for the rôle that he wore insignificant tight turned-down collars, never having perceived the immense moral advantage conferred on the diplomatist by a high, loose, wide-rolling collar. Also he was sick of captivity, and this in no wise lessened his objection to freedom. He had lost all youthful enthusiasm, and was in fact equally bored with earth and with heaven.

Nevertheless, he had authority and security. He was accustomed to the public gaze and to the forms of deference. He knew that he was as secure as a judge, and far more secure than a Cabinet Minister. Nothing but the inconceivable collapse of a powerful and wealthy sect could affect his position or his livelihood to the very end of life. Hence, beneath his weariness and his professional attitudinarianism

there was a hint of the devil-may-care that had its piquancy. He could foresee with indifference even the distant but approaching day when he would have to rise in the pulpit and assert that the literal inspiration of the Scriptures was not and never had been an essential article of Wesleyan faith.

Edwin blanched at the apparition of Mr. Peartree. That even Auntie Hamps should dare uninvited to bring a Wesleyan minister to the party was startling; but that the minister should be Mr. Peartree staggered him. For twenty years and more Edwin had secretly, and sometimes in public, borne a tremendous grudge against Mr. Peartree. He had execrated, anathematized, and utterly excommunicated Mr. Peartree, and had extended the fearful curse to his family, all his ancestors, and all his descendants. When Mr. Peartree was young and fervent in the service of heaven he had had the monstrous idea of instituting a Saturday Afternoon Bible Class for schoolboys. Abetted by parents weak-minded and cruel, he had caught and horribly tortured some score of miserable victims, of whom Edwin was one. The bitter memory of those weekly half-holidays thieved from him and made desolate by a sanctimonious crank had never softened, nor had Edwin ever forgiven Mr. Peartree.

It was at the sessions of the Bible Class that Edwin, while silently perfecting himself in the art of profanity and blasphemy, had in secret fury envenomed his instinctive mild objection to the dogma, the ritual, and the spirit of conventional Christianity, especially as exemplified in Wesleyan Methodism. He had left Mr. Peartree's Bible Class a convinced anti-religionist, a hater and despiser of all that the Wesleyan Chapel and Mr. Peartree stood for. He deliberately was not impartial, and he took a horrid pleasure in being unfair. He knew well that Methodism had produced many fine characters, and played a part in the moral development of the race; but he would not listen to his own knowledge. Nothing could extenuate, for him, the noxiousness of Methodism. On the other hand, he was full of glee if he could add anything to the indictment against it and Christianity. Huxley's controversial victories over Gladstone were then occurring in the monthly Press, and he acclaimed them with

enormous gusto. When he first read that the Virgin Birth was a feature of sundry creeds more ancient than Christianity, his private satisfaction was intense and lasted acutely for days. When he heard that Methodism had difficulty in maintaining its supply of adequately equipped ministers, he rejoiced with virulence. His hostility was the more significant in that it was concealed—embedded like a foreign substance in the rather suave gentleness of his nature. At intervals—decreasingly frequent, it is true—he would carry it into the chapel itself; for through mingled cowardice and sharp prudence, he had not formally left the Connexion. To compensate himself for such borings-down he would now and then assert, judiciously to a reliable male friend, or with ferocious contempt to a scandalized defenceless sister, that, despite all parsons, religion was not a necessity of the human soul, and that he personally had never felt the need of it, and never would. In which assertion he was profoundly sincere.

And yet throughout he had always thought of himself as a rebel against authority; and—such is the mysterious intimidating prestige of the past—he was outwardly an apologetic rebel. Neither his intellectual pride nor his cold sustained resentment, nor his axiomatic conviction of the crude and total falseness of Christian theology, nor all three together, had ever sufficed to rid him of the self-excusing air. When Auntie Hamps spoke with careful reverence of ‘the Super’ (short for ‘superintendent minister’), the word had never in thirty years quite failed to inspire in him some of the awe with which he had heard it as an infant. Just as a policeman was not an employee but a *policeman*, so a minister was not a person of the trading-class who happened to have been through a certain educational establishment, subscribed to certain beliefs, submitted to certain ceremonies and adopted a certain costume—but a *minister*, a being inexplicably endowed with authority—in fact a sort of arch-policeman. And thus, while detesting and despising him, Edwin had never thought of Abel Peartree as merely a man.

Now, in the gas-lit bustle of the hall, after an interval of about twenty years, he beheld again his enemy, his bugbear, his loathed oppressor, the living symbol of all that his soul condemned.

Said Mrs. Hamps :

"I reminded Mr. Peartree that you used to attend his Bible Class, Edwin. Do you remember? I hope you do."

"Oh, yes!" said Edwin, with a slight nervous laugh, blushing. His eye caught Clara's, but there was no sign whatever of the old malicious grin on her maternal face. Nor did Maggie's show a tremor. And, of course, the majestic duplicity of Auntie Hamps did not quiver under the strain. So that the Rev. Mr. Peartree, protesting honestly that he should have recognized his old pupil Mr. Clayhanger anywhere, never suspected the terrific drama of the moment.

And the next moment there was no drama. . . . Teacher and pupil shook hands. The recognition was mutual. To Edwin, Mr. Peartree, save for the greying of his hair, had not changed. His voice, his form, his gestures, were absolutely the same. Only, instead of being Mr. Peartree, he was a man like another man—a commonplace, hard-featured, weary man; a spare little man, with a greenish-black coat and bluish-white low collar; a perfunctory, listless man with an unpleasant voice; a man with the social code of the Benbows and Auntie Hamps; a man the lines of whose face disclosed a narrow and self-satisfied ignorance; a man whose destiny had forbidden him ever to be natural; the usual snobbish man, who had heard of the importance and the success and the wealth of Edwin Clayhanger and who kotowed thereto and was naïvely impressed thereby, and proud that Edwin Clayhanger had once been his pupil; and withal an average decent fellow.

Edwin rather liked the casual look in Mr. Peartree's eyes that said: "My being here is part of my job. I'm indifferent. I do what I have to do, and I really don't care. I have paid tens of thousands of calls and I shall pay tens of thousands more. If I am bored I am paid to be bored, and I repeat I really don't care." This was the human side of Mr. Peartree showing itself. It endeared him to Edwin.

"Not a bad sort of cuss, after all!" thought Edwin.

All the carefully tended rage and animosity of twenty years evaporated out of his heart and was gone. He did not forgive Mr. Peartree, because there was no Mr. Peartree—there was only this man. And there was no Wesleyan chapel either,

but only an ugly forlorn three-quarters-empty building at the top of Duck Bank. And Edwin was no longer an apologetic rebel, nor even any kind of a rebel. It occurred to nobody, not even to the mighty Edwin, that in those few seconds the history of dogmatic religion had passed definitely out of one stage into another.

Abel Peartree nonchalantly, and with a practised aplomb which was not disturbed even by the vision of George's heroic stallion, said the proper things to Edwin and Hilda; and it became known, somehow, that the parson was revisiting Bursley in order to deliver his well-known lecture entitled "The Mantle and Mission of Elijah,"—the sole lecture of his repertoire, but it had served to raise him ever so slightly out of the ruck of 'Supers.' Hilda patronized him. Against the rich background of her home she assumed the pose of the grand lady. Abel Peartree seemed to like the pose, and grew momentarily vivacious in knightly response. "And why not?" said Edwin to himself, justifying his wife after being a little critical of her curtness.

Then, when the conversation fell, Auntie Hamps discreetly suggested that she and the girls should 'go upstairs.' The negligent Hilda had inexcusably forgotten in her nervous excitement that on these occasions arriving ladies should be at once escorted to the specially-titivated best bedroom, there to lay their things on the best counterpane. She perhaps ought to have atoned for her negligence by herself leading Auntie Hamps to the bedroom. But instead she deputed Ada. "And why not?" said Edwin to himself again. As the ladies mounted Mr. Peartree laughed genuinely at one of Albert Benbow's characteristic pleasantries, which always engloomed Edwin. "Kindred spirits, those two!" thought the superior sardonic Edwin, and privately raised his eyebrows to his wife, who answered the signal.

## II

Somewhat later, various other guests having come and distributed themselves over the reception-rooms, the chandeliers glinted down their rays upon light summer frocks and some jewellery and coats of black and dark grey and blue; and the best counterpanes in the best bedroom were completely



hidden by mantles and cloaks, and the hatstand in the hall heavily clustered with hats and caps. The reception was in being, and the interior full of animation. Edwin, watchful and hospitably anxious, wandered out of the drawing-room into the hall. The door of the breakfast-room was ajar, and he could hear Clara's voice behind it. He knew that the Benbows and Maggie and Auntie Hamps were all in the breakfast-room, and he blamed chiefly Clara for this provincial clannishness, which was so characteristic of her. Surely Auntie Hamps at any rate ought to have realized that the duty of members of the family was to spread themselves among the other guests!

He listened.

"No," Clara was saying, "we don't know what's happened to him since he came out of prison. He got two years." She was speaking in what Edwin called her 'scandal' tones—low, clipped, intimate, eager, blissful.

And then Albert Benbow's voice:

"He's had the good sense not to bother us."

Edwin, while resenting the conversation and the Benbows' use of 'we' and 'us' in a matter which did not concern them, was grimly comforted by the thought of their ignorance of a detail which would have interested them passionately. None but Hilda and himself knew that the bigamist was at that moment in prison again for another and a later offence. Everything had been told but that.

"Of course," said Clara, "they needn't have said anything about the bigamy at all, and nobody outside the family need have known that poor Hilda was not just an ordinary widow. But we all thought——"

"I don't know so much about that, Clara," Albert Benbow interrupted his wife. "You mustn't forget his real wife came to Turnhill to make inquiries. That started a hare."

"Well, you know what I mean," said Clara vaguely.

Mr. Peartree's voice came in:

"But surely the case was in the papers?"

"I expect it was in the Sussex papers," Albert replied. "You see, they went through the ceremony of marriage at Lewes. But it never got into the local rag, because he got married in his real name,—Cannon wasn't his real name;

and he'd no address in the Five Towns then. He was just a boarding-house keeper at Brighton. It was a miracle it didn't get into the 'Signal,' if you ask me; but it didn't. I happen to know"—his voice grew important—"that the 'Signal' people have an arrangement with the Press Association for a full report of all matrimonial cases that 'ud be likely to interest the district. However, the Press Association weren't quite on the spot that time. And it's not surprising they weren't, either."

Clara resumed:

"No. It never came out. Still, as I say, we all thought it best not to conceal anything. Albert strongly advised Edwin not to attempt any such thing." ("What awful rot!" thought Edwin.) "So we just mentioned it quietly like to a few friends. After all, poor Hilda was perfectly innocent. Of course she felt her position keenly when she came to live here after the wedding." ("Did she indeed!" thought Edwin.) "Edwin would have the wedding in London. We did so feel for her." ("Did you indeed!" thought Edwin.) "She wouldn't have an At Home. I knew it was a mistake not to. We all knew. But no, she *would not*. Folks began to talk. They thought it strange she didn't have an At Home like other folks. Many young married women have two At Homes nowadays. So in the end she was persuaded. She fixed it for August because she thought so many people would be away at the seaside. But they aren't—at least not so many as you'd think. Albert says it's owing to the General Election upset. And she wouldn't have it in the afternoon like other folks. Mrs. Edwin isn't like other folks, and you can't alter her."

"What's the matter with the evening for an At Home, anyhow?" asked Benbow the breezy and consciously broad-minded.

"Oh, of course, *I* quite agree. I like it. But folks are so funny."

After a momentary pause, Mr. Peartree said uncertainly:

"And there's a little boy?"

Said Clara:

"Yes, the one you've seen."

Said Auntie Hamps:

"Poor little thing! I do feel so sorry for him—when he grows up——"

"You needn't, Auntie," said Maggie curtly, expressing her attitude to George in that mild curtness.

"Of course," said Clara quickly. "We never let it make any difference. In fact our Bert and he are rather friends, aren't they, Albert?"

At this moment George himself opened the door of the dining-room, letting out a faint buzz of talk and clink of vessels. His mouth was not empty. Precipitately Edwin plunged into the breakfast-room.

"Hello! You people!" he murmured. "Well, Mr. Peartree."

There they were—all of them, including the parson—grouped together, lusciously bathing in the fluid of scandal.

Clara turned, and without the least constraint said sweetly :

"Oh, Edwin! There you are! I was just telling Mr. Peartree about you and Hilda, you know. We thought it would be better."

"You see," said Auntie Hamps impressively, "Mr. Peartree will be about the town to-morrow, and a word from *him*——"

Mr. Peartree tried unsuccessfully to look as if he was nobody in particular.

"That's all right," said Edwin. "Perhaps the door might as well be shut." He thought, as many a man has thought : "My relations take the cake!"

Clara occupied the only easy-chair in the room. Mrs. Hamps and the parson were seated. Maggie stood. Albert Benbow, ever uxorious, was perched sideways on the arm of his wife's chair. Clara, centre of the conclave, and of all conclaves in which she took part, was the mother of five children, and nearing thirty-five years of age. Maternity had ruined her once slim figure, but neither she nor Albert seemed to mind that,—they seemed rather to be proud of her unshapeliness. Her face was unspoiled. She was pretty, and had a marvellously fair complexion. In her face Edwin could still always plainly see the pert, charming, malicious girl of fourteen who loathed Auntie Hamps and was rude to her behind her back. But Clara and Auntie Hamps were fast friends nowadays. Clara's brood had united them.

They thought alike on all topics. Clara had accepted Auntie Hamps's code practically entire ; but on the other hand she had dominated Auntie Hamps. The respect which Auntie Hamps showed for Clara and for Edwin, and in a slightly less degree for Maggie, was a strange phenomenon in the old age of that grandiose and vivacious pillar of Wesleyanism and the conventions.

Edwin did not like Clara ; he objected to her domesticity, her motherliness, her luxuriant fruitfulness, the intonations of her voice, her intense self-satisfaction and her remarkable duplicity ; and perhaps more than anything to her smug provinciality. He did not positively dislike his brother-in-law, but he objected to him for his uxoriousness, his cheerful assurance of Clara's perfection, his contented and conceited ignorance of all intellectual matters, his incorrigible vulgarity of a small manufacturer who displays everywhere the stigmata of petty commerce, and his ingenuous love of office. As for Maggie, the plump spinster of forty, Edwin respected her when he thought of her, but reproached her for social gawkiness and taciturnity. As for Auntie Hamps, he could not respect, but he was forced to admire her gorgeous and sustained hypocrisy, in which no flaw had ever been found, and which victimized even herself ; he was always invigorated by her ageless energy and the sight of her handsome, erect, valiant figure.

Edwin's absence had stopped the natural free course of conversation. But there were at least three people in the room whom nothing could abash : Mrs. Hamps, Clara, and Mr. Peartree.

Mr. Peartree, sitting up with his hands on his baggy knees, said :

" Everything seems to have turned out very well in the end, Mr. Clayhanger—very well, indeed." His features showed less of the tedium of life.

" Eh, yes ! Eh, yes ! " breathed Auntie Hamps in ecstasy.

Edwin, diffident and ill-pleased, was about to suggest that the family might advantageously separate, when George came after him into the room.

" Oh ! " cried George.

" Well, little jockey ! " Clara began instantly to him with

an exaggerated sweetness that Edwin thought must nauseate the child, "would you like Bert to come up and play with you one of these afternoons?"

George stared at her, and slowly flushed.

"Yes," said George. "Only——"

"Only what?"

"Supposing I was doing something else when he came?"

Without waiting for possible developments George turned to leave the room again.

"You're a caution, you are!" said Albert Benbow; and to the adults: "Hates to be disturbed, I suppose."

"That's it," said Edwin responsively, as brother-in-law to brother-in-law. But he felt that he, with a few months' experience of another's child, appreciated the exquisite strange sensibility of children infinitely better than Albert were he fifty times a father.

"What is a caution, Uncle Albert?" asked George, peeping back from the door.

Auntie Hamps good-humouredly warned the child of the danger of being impertinent to his elders:

"George! George!"

"A caution is a caution to snakes," said Albert. "Shoo!" Making a noise like a rocket, he feinted to pursue the boy with violence.

Mr. Peartree laughed rather loudly, and rather like a human being, at the word 'snakes.' Albert Benbow's flashes of humour, indeed, seemed to surprise him, if only for an instant, out of his attitudinarianism.

Clara smiled, flattered by the power of her husband to reveal the humanity of the parson.

"Albert's so good with children," she said. "He always knows exactly . . ." She stopped, leaving what he knew exactly to the listeners' imagination.

Uncle Albert and George could be heard scuffling in the hall.

Auntie Hamps rose with a gentle sigh, saying:

"I suppose we ought to join the others."

Her social sense, which was pretty well developed, had at last prevailed.

The sisters Maggie and Clara, one in light and the other



in dark green, walked out of the room. Maggie's face had already stiffened into mute constraint, and Clara's into self-importance, at the prospect of meeting the general company.

## III

Auntie Hamps held back, and Edwin at once perceived from the conspiratorial glance in her splendid eyes that in suggesting a move she had intended to deceive her fellow-conspirator in life, Clara. But Auntie Hamps could not live without chicane. And she was happiest when she had superimposed chicane upon chicane in complex folds.

She put a ringed hand softly but arrestingly upon Edwin's arm, and pushed the door to. Alone with her and the parson, Edwin felt himself to be at bay, and he drew back before an unknown menace.

"Edwin, dear," said she, "Mr. Peartree has something to suggest to you. I was going to say 'a favour to ask,' but I won't put it like that. I'm sure my nephew will look upon it as a privilege. You know how much Mr. Peartree has at heart the District Additional Chapels Fund——"

Edwin did not know how much ; but he had heard of the Macclesfield District Additional Chapels Fund, Bursley being one of the circuits in the Macclesfield District. Wesleyanism finding itself confronted with lessening congregations and with a shortage of ministers, the Macclesfield District had determined to prove that Wesleyanism was nevertheless spiritually vigorous by the odd method of building more chapels. Mr. Peartree, inventor of Saturday Afternoon Bible Classes for schoolboys, was one of the originators of the bricky scheme, and in fact his lecture upon the "Mantle and Mission of Elijah" was to be in aid of it. The next instant Mr. Peartree had invited Edwin to act as District Treasurer of the Fund, the previous treasurer having died.

More chicane ! The parson's visit, then, was not a mere friendly call, inspired by the moment. It was part of a scheme. It had been planned against him. Did they (he seemed to be asking himself) think him so ingenuous, so simple, as not to see through their dodge ? If not, then why the preliminary pretences ? He did not really ask himself these questions, for the reason that he knew the answers to them.

When a piece of chicane had succeeded, Auntie Hamps forgot it, and expected others to forget it,—or at any rate she dared, by her magnificent front, anybody on earth to remind her of it. She was quite indifferent whether Edwin saw through her dodge or not.

“You’re so good at business,” said she.

Ah! She would insist on the business side of the matter, affecting to ignore the immense moral significance which would be attached to Edwin’s acceptance of the office! Were he to yield, the triumph for Methodism would ring through the town. He read all her thoughts. Nothing could break down her magnificent front. She had cornered him by a device; she had him at bay; and she counted on his weak good-nature, on his easygoing cowardice for a victory.

Mr. Peartree talked. Mr. Peartree expressed his certitude that Edwin was ‘with them at heart,’ and his absolute reliance upon Edwin’s sense of the responsibilities of a man in his, Edwin’s, position. Auntie Hamps recalled with fervour Edwin’s early activities in Methodism—the Young Men’s Debating Society, for example, which met at six o’clock on frosty winter mornings for the proving of the faith by dialectics.

And Edwin faltered in his speech.

“You ought to get Albert,” he feebly suggested.

“Oh, no!” said Auntie. “Albert is grand in his own line. But for this, *we want a man like you.*”

It was a master-stroke. Edwin had the illusion of trembling, and yet he knew that he did not tremble, even inwardly. He seemed to see the forces of evolution and the forces of reaction ranged against each other in a supreme crisis. He seemed to see the alternative of two futures for himself—and in one he would be a humiliated and bored slave, and in the other a fine, reckless ensign of freedom. He seemed to be doubtful of his own courage. But at the bottom of his soul he was not doubtful. He remembered all the frightful and degrading ennui which when he was young he had suffered as a martyr to Wesleyanism and dogma, all the sinister deceptions which he had had to practise and which had been practised upon him. He remembered his almost lifelong intense hatred of Mr. Peartree. And he might have clenched his hands bitterly and said with homicidal animosity: “*Now I will pay you*

out ! And I will tell you the truth ! And I will wither you up and incinerate you, and be revenged for everything in one single sentence ! ” But he felt no bitterness, and his animosity was dead. At the bottom of his soul there was nothing but a bland indifference that did not even scorn.

“ No,” he said quietly, “ I shan’t be your treasurer. You must ask somebody else.”

A vast satisfaction filled him. The refusal was so easy, the opposing forces so negligible.

Auntie Hamps and Mr. Peartree knew nothing of the peculiar phenomena induced in Edwin’s mind by the first sight of the legendary Abel Peartree after twenty years. But Auntie Hamps, though puzzled for an explanation, comprehended that she was decisively beaten. The blow was hard. Nevertheless she did not wince. The superb pretence must be kept up, and she kept it up. She smiled, and, tossing her curls, checked Edwin with cheerful, indomitable rapidity.

“ Now, now ! Don’t decide at once. Think it over very carefully, and we shall ask you again. Mr. Peartree will write to you. I feel sure . . . ”

Appearances were preserved.

The colloquy was interrupted by Hilda, who came in excited, gay, with sparkling eyes, humming an air. She had protested vehemently against an At Home. She had said again and again that the idea of an At Home was abhorrent to her, and that she hated all such wholesale formal hospitalities, and could not bear ‘ people.’ And yet now she was enchanted with her situation as hostess—delighted with herself and her rich dress, almost ecstatically aware of her own attractiveness and domination. The sight of her gave pleasure and communicated zest. Mature, she was yet only beginning life. And as she glanced with secret condescension at the listless Mr. Peartree, she seemed to say : “ What is all this talk of heaven and hell ? I am in love with life and the senses, and everything is lawful to me, and I am above you.” And even Auntie Hamps, though one of the most self-sufficient creatures that ever lived, envied in her glorious decay the young maturity of sensuous Hilda.

“ Well,” said Hilda, “ what’s going on *here* ? They’re all gone mad about missing words in the drawing-room.”

She smiled splendidly at Edwin, whose pride in her thrilled him. Her superiority to other women was patent; she made other women seem negative. In fact, she was a tingling woman before she was anything else—that was it! He compared her with Clara, who was now nothing but a mother, and with Maggie, who had never been anything at all.

Mr. Peartree made the mistake of telling her the subject of the conversation. She did not wait to hear what Edwin's answer had been.

She said curtly and with finality:

"Oh, no! I won't have it!"

Edwin did not quite like this. The matter concerned him alone, and he was an absolutely free agent. She ought to have phrased her objection different. For example, she might have said: "I hope he has refused."

Still, his annoyance was infinitesimal.

"The poor boy works quite hard enough as it is," she added, with a delicious caressing intonation of the first words.

He liked that. But she was confusing the issue. She always would confuse the issue. It was not because the office would involve extra work for him that he had declined the invitation, as she well knew.

Of course Auntie Hamps said in a flash:

"If it means overwork for him I shouldn't dream . . ."

She was putting the safety of appearances beyond doubt.

"By the way, Auntie," Hilda continued, "what's the trouble about the pew down at chapel? Both Clara and Maggie have mentioned it."

"Trouble, my dear?" exclaimed Auntie Hamps, justifiably shocked that Hilda should employ such a word in the presence of Mr. Peartree. But Hilda was apt to be headlong.

To the pew originally taken by Edwin's father, and since his death standing in Edwin's name, Clara had brought her husband; and although it was a long pew, the fruits of the marriage had gradually filled it, so that if Edwin chanced to go to chapel there was not too much room for him in the pew, which presented the appearance of a second-class railway carriage crowded with season-ticket holders. Albert Benbow had suggested that Edwin should yield up the pew to the Benbows, and take a smaller pew for himself and Hilda and

George. But the women had expressed fear lest Edwin 'might not like' this break in a historic tradition, and Albert Benbow had been forbidden to put forward the suggestion until the diplomatic sex had examined the ground.

"We shall be only too pleased for Albert to take over the pew," said Hilda.

"But have you chosen another pew?" Mrs. Hamps looked at Edwin.

"Oh, no!" said Hilda lightly.

"But——"

"Now, Auntie," the tingling woman warned Auntie Hamps as one powerful individuality may warn another, "don't worry about us. You know we're not great chapel-goers."

She spoke the astounding words gaily but firmly. She could be firm and even harsh in her triumphant happiness. Edwin knew that she detested Auntie Hamps. Auntie Hamps no doubt also knew it. In their mutual smilings, so affable, so hearty, so appreciative, apparently so impulsive, the hostility between them gleamed mysteriously like lightning in sunlight.

"Mrs. Edwin's family were Church of England," said Auntie Hamps in the direction of Mr. Peartree.

"No great church-goers, either," Hilda finished cheerfully.

No woman had ever made such outrageous remarks in the Five Towns before. A quarter of a century ago a man might have said as much, without suffering in esteem—might indeed have earned a certain intellectual prestige by the declaration; but it was otherwise with a woman. Both Mrs. Hamps and the minister thought that Hilda was not going the right way to live down her dubious past. Even Edwin in his pride was flurried. Great matters, however, had been accomplished. Not only had the attack of Auntie Hamps and Mr. Peartree been defeated, but the defence had become an onslaught. Not only was he not the treasurer of the District Additional Chapels Fund, but he had practically ceased to be a member of the congregation. He was free with a freedom which he had never had the audacity to hope for. It was incredible! Yet there it was! A word said, bravely, in a particular tone,—and a new epoch was begun. The pity was that he had not done it all himself. Hilda's courage had surpassed his own.



Women were astounding. They were disconcerting too. His manly independence was ever so little wounded by Hilda's boldness in initiative on their joint behalf.

"Do come and take something, Auntie," said Hilda, with the most winning, the most loving inflexion.

Auntie Hamps passed out.

Hilda turned back into the room: "Do go with auntie, Mr. Peartree. I must just——" She affected to search for something on the mantelpiece.

Mr. Peartree passed out. He was unmoved. He did not care in his heart. And as Edwin caught his indifferent eye, with that 'it's-all-one-to-me' glint in it, his soul warmed again slightly to Mr. Peartree. And further, Mr. Peartree's aloof unworldliness, his personal practical unconcern with money, feasting, ambition, and all the grosser forms of self-satisfaction, made Edwin feel somewhat a sensual average man and accordingly humiliated him.

As soon as, almost before, Mr. Peartree was beyond the door, Hilda leaped at Edwin, and kissed him violently. The door was not closed. He could hear the varied hum of the party.

"I had to kiss you while it's all going on," she whispered. Ardent vitality shimmered in her eyes.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WORD

#### I

**A**DA was just crossing the hall to the drawing-room, a telegram on a salver in her red hand.

"Here you are, Ada," said Edwin, stopping her, with a gesture towards the telegram.

"It's for Mr. Tom Swetnam, sir."

Edwin and Hilda followed the starched and fussy girl into the drawing-room, in which were about a dozen people, including Fearn, the lawyer, and his wife, the recently married Stephen and Vera Cheswardine, several Swetnams, and Janet Orgreave, who sat at the closed piano, smiling vaguely.

Tom Swetnam, standing up, took the telegram.

"I never knew they delivered telegrams at this time o' night," said Fearn sharply, looking at his watch. He was wont to keep a careful eye on the organization of railways, ships, posts, and other contrivances for the shifting of matter from one spot to another. An exacting critic of detail, he was proud of them in the mass, and called them civilization.

"They don't," said Tom Swetnam, naughtily, glad to plague a man older than himself, and the father of a family. Tom was a mere son, but he had travelled, and was, indeed, just returned from an excursion through Scandinavia. "Observe there's no deception. The envelope's been opened. Moreover, it's addressed to Ben Clewlow, not to me. Ben's sent it up—I asked him to. Now, we'll see."

Having displayed the envelope like a conjurer, he drew forth the telegram, and prepared to read it aloud. One half of the company was puzzled; the other half showed an instructed excitement. Tom read the message:

"Twenty-seven pounds ten nine. Philosophers tell us that there is nothing new under the sun. Nevertheless it

may well be doubted whether the discovery of gold at Barmouth, together with two earthquake shocks following each other in quick succession in the same district, does not constitute, in the history of the gallant little Principality, a double event of unique——' " He stopped.

Vera Cheswardine, pretty, fluffy, elegant, cried out with all the impulsiveness of her nature :

" Novelty ! "

" Whatever is it all about ? " mildly asked Mrs. Fearn, a quiet and dignified, youngish woman whom motherhood had made somewhat absent-minded when she was away from her children.

" Missing-word competition," Fearn explained to her with curt, genial superiority. He laughed outright. " You do go it, some of you chaps," he said. " Why, that telegram cost over a couple of bob, I bet ! "

" Well, you see," said Tom Swetnam, " three of us share it. We get it thirty-six hours before the paper's out—fellow in London—and there's so much more time to read the dictionary. No use half-doing a thing ! Twenty-seven pounds odd ! Not a bad share this week, eh ? "

" Won anything ? "

" Rather. We had the wire about the winning words this morning. We'd sent it in four times—that makes about £110, doesn't it ? Between three of us. We sent in nearly two hundred postal orders, which leaves £100 clear. Thirty-three quid apiece, net."

He tried to speak calmly and nonchalantly, but his excitement was extreme. The two younger Swetnams regarded him with awe. Everybody was deeply impressed by the prodigious figures, and in many hearts envy, covetousness, and the wild desire for a large, free life of luxury were aroused.

" Seems to me you've reduced this game to a science," said Edwin.

" Well, we have," Tom Swetnam admitted. " We send in every possible word."

" It's a mere thousand per cent. profit per week," murmured Fearn, " at the rate of fifty thousand per cent. per annum."

Albert Benbow, entering, caught the last phrase, which very properly whetted his curiosity as a man of business.

Clara followed him closely. On nearly all ceremonial occasions these two had an instinctive need of each other's presence and support ; and if Albert did not run after Clara, Clara ran after Albert.

## II

Then came the proof of the genius, the cynicism and the insight of the leviathan newspaper-proprietor who had invented the dodge of inviting his readers to risk a shilling and also to buy a coupon for the privilege of supplying a missing word, upon the understanding that the shillings of those who supplied the wrong word should be taken for ever away from them and given to those who supplied the right word. The entire company in the Clayhanger drawing-room was absorbed in the tremendous missing-word topic, and listened to Swetnam as to a new prophet bearing the secret of eternal felicity. The rumour of Swetnam's triumph drew people out of the delectable dining-room to listen to his remarks ; and among these was Auntie Hamps. So it was in a thousand, in ten thousand, in hundreds of thousands of homes of all kinds throughout the kingdom. The leviathan journalist's readers (though as a rule they read nothing in his paper save the truncated paragraph and the rules of the competition) had grown to be equivalent to the whole British public. And he not only held them but he had overshadowed all other interests in their minds. Upon honeymoons people thought of the missing word amid caresses, and it is a fact that people had died with the missing word on their lips. Sane adults of both sexes read the dictionary through from end to end every week with an astounding conscientiousness. The leviathan newspaper-proprietor could not buy enough paper, nor hire sufficient presses, to meet the national demands. And no wonder, seeing that any small newsagent in a side-street was liable at any moment to receive an order from an impassioned student of periodical literature for more copies of one issue of the journal than the whole town had been used to buy before the marvellous invention of the missing word. The post office was incommoded ; even the Postmaster-General was incommoded, and only by heroic efforts and miraculous feats of resourcefulness did he save himself from the ignominy of running out of shilling postal orders. Post-office girls

sold shilling postal orders with a sarcastic smile, with acerbity, with reluctance,—it was naught to them that the revenue was benefited and the pressure on taxpayers eased. Employers throughout the islands suffered vast losses owing to the fact that for months their offices and factories were inhabited, not by clerks and other employees, but by wage-paid monomaniacs who did naught but read dictionaries and cut out and fill up coupons. And over all the land there hung the dark incredible menace of an unjust prosecution under the Gambling Laws, urged by interfering busybodies who would not let a nation alone.

“And how much did you make last week, Mr. Swetnam?” judicially asked Albert Benbow, who was rather pleased and flattered, as an active Wesleyan, to rub shoulders with frank men of the world like Tom. As an active Wesleyan he had hitherto utterly refused to listen to the missing word, but now it seemed to be acquiring respectability enough for his ears.

Swetnam replied with a casual air:

“We didn’t make much last week. We won something, of course. We win every week; that’s a mathematical certainty—but sometimes the expenses mount up a bit higher than the receipts. It depends on the word. If it’s an ordinary word that everybody chooses, naturally the share is a small one because there are so many winners.” He gave no more exact details.

Clara breathed a disillusioned “Oh!” implying that she had known there must be some flaw in the scheme—and her husband had at once put his finger on it.

But her husband, with incipient enthusiasm for the word, said:

“Well, it stands to reason they must take one week with another, and average it out.”

“Now, Albert! Now, Albert!” Edwin warned him. “No gambling.”

Albert replied with some warmth:

“I don’t see that there’s any gambling in it. Appears to me that it’s chiefly skill and thoroughness that does the trick.”

“Gambling!” murmured Tom Swetnam shortly. “Of course it’s not gambling.”



"No!"

"Well," said Vera Cheswardine, "I say 'novelty.' 'A double event of unique novelty.' That's it."

"I shouldn't go nap on 'novelty,' if I were you," said Tom Swetnam, the expert.

Tom read the thing again.

"'Novelty,'" Vera repeated. "I know it's 'novelty.' I'm always right, aren't I, Stephen?" She looked round. "Ask Stephen."

"You were right last week but one, my child," said Stephen.

"And did you make anything?" Clara demanded eagerly.

"Only fifteen shillings," said Vera discontentedly. "But if Stephen had listened to me we should have made lots."

Albert Benbow's interest in the word was strengthened.

Fearns, leaning carefully back in his chair, asked with fine indifference:

"By the way, what is this week's word, Tom? I haven't your secret sources of information. I have to wait for the paper."

"'Unaccountably,'" said Tom. "Had you anything on it?"

"No," Fearns admitted. "I've caught a cold this week, it seems."

Albert Benbow stared at him. Here was another competitor—and as acute a man of business as you would find in the Five Towns!

"Me, too!" said Edwin, smiling like a culprit.

Hilda sprang up gleefully, and pointed at him a finger of delicious censure.

"Oh! You wicked sinner! You never told me you'd gone in! You deceitful old thing!"

"Well, it was a man at the shop who would have me try," Edwin boyishly excused himself.

### III

Hilda's vivacity enchanted Edwin. The charm of her reproof was simply exquisite in its good-nature and in the elegance of its gesture. The lingering taste of the feverish kiss she had given him a few minutes earlier bemused him and he flushed. To conceal his inconvenient happiness in the

thought of his wife he turned to open the new enlarged window that gave on the garden. (He had done away with the old garden-entrance of the house, and thrown the side corridor into the drawing-room.) Then he moved towards Janet Orgreave, who was still seated at the closed piano.

"Your father isn't coming, I suppose?" he asked her quietly.

The angelic spinster, stylishly dressed in white, and wearing as usual her kind heart on her sleeve, smiled with soft benignity and shook her head.

"He told me to tell you he was too old. He *is*, you know."

"And how's your mother?"

"Oh, pretty well, considering. . . . I really ought not to leave them."

"Oh, yes!" Edwin protested. The momentary vision of Mr. and Mrs. Orgreave in the large house close by, now practically deserted by all their children except Janet, saddened him.

Then a loud voice dominated the general conversation behind him:

"I say, this is a bit stiff. I did think I should be free of it here. But no! Same old missing word everywhere! What is it this week, Swetnam?"

It was Johnnie Orgreave, appreciably younger than his sister, but a full-grown man of the world, and somewhat dandiacal. After shaking hands with Hilda he came straight to Edwin.

"Awfully sorry I'm so late, old chap. How do, Jan?"

"Of course you are," Edwin quizzed him like an uncle.

"Where's Ingpen?"

"Not come."

"Not come! He said he should be here at eight. Just like him!" said Johnnie. "I expect he's had a puncture."

"I've been looking out for him every minute," Edwin muttered.

In the middle of the room Albert Benbow, stocky and vulgar, but feeling himself more and more a man of the world among men and women of the world, was proclaiming, not without excitement:

"Well, I agree with Mrs. Cheswardine. 'Novelty' 's much

more likely than 'interest.' 'Interest' 's the wrong kind of word altogether. It doesn't agree with the beginning of the paragraph."

"That's right, Mr. Benbow," Vera encouraged him with flirtatious dimples. "You put your money on me, even if my own husband won't." Albert as a dowdy Dissenter was quite out of her expensive sphere, but to Vera any man was a man.

"Now, Albert," Clara warned him, "if you win anything, you must give it to me for the new perambulator."

("Dash that girl's infernal domesticity!" thought Edwin savagely.)

"Who says I'm going in for it, missis?" Albert challenged.

"I only say *if* you do, dear," Clara said smoothly.

"Then I *will*!" Albert announced the great decision. "Just for the fun of the thing, I will. Thank ye, Mrs. Cheswardine."

He glanced at Mrs. Cheswardine as a knight at his unattainable mistress. Indeed the decision had in it something of the chivalrous; the attention of slim provocative Vera, costliest and most fashionably dressed woman in Bursley, had stirred his fancy to wander far beyond its usual limits.

"Albert! Well, I never!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamps.

"You don't mind, do you, Auntie?" said Albert jovially, standing over her.

"Not if it's not gambling," said Mrs. Hamps stoutly. "And I hope it isn't. And it would be very nice for Clara, I'm sure, if you won."

"Hurrah for Mrs. Hamps!" Johnnie Orgreave almost yelled.

At the same moment, Janet Orgreave, swinging round on the music stool, lifted the lid of the piano, and, still with her soft, angelic smile, played loudly and dashinglly the barbaric, Bacchic, orgiastic melody which had just recently inflamed England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and the Five Towns—the air which was unlike anything ever heard before by British ears, and which meant nothing whatever that could be avowed, the air which heralded social revolutions and inaugurated a new epoch. And as the ringed fingers of the quiet, fading spinster struck out the shocking melody, Vera

Cheswardine and one or two others who had been to London and there seen the great legendary figure, Lottie Collins, hummed more or less brazenly the syllables heavy with mysterious significance :

*" Tarara-boom-deay !  
Tarara-boom-deay !  
Tarara-boom-deay !  
Tarara-boom-deay ! "*

Upon this entered Mr. Peartree, like a figure of retribution, and silence fell.

" I'm afraid . . ." he began. " Mr. Benbow."

They spoke together.

A scared servant-girl had come up from the Benbow home with the affrighting news that Bert Benbow, who had gone to bed with the other children as usual, was not in his bed and could not be discovered in the house. Mr. Peartree, being in the hall, had chosen himself to bear the grievous tidings to the drawing-room. In an instant Albert and Clara were parents again. Both had an idea that the unprecedented, incomprehensible calamity was a heavenly dispensation to punish them for having trifled with the missing word. Their sudden seriousness was terrific. They departed immediately, without ceremony of any sort. Mrs. Hamps said that she really ought to go too, and Maggie said that as Auntie Hamps was going she also would go. The parson said that he had already stayed longer than he ought, in view of another engagement, and he followed. Edwin and Hilda dutifully saw them off and were as serious as the circumstances demanded. But those who remained in the drawing-room sniggered, and when Hilda rejoined them she laughed. The house felt lighter. Edwin, remaining longest at the door, saw a bicyclist on one of the still quaint pneumatic-tyred ' safety ' bicycles, coming along behind a " King of the Road " lamp. The rider dismounted at the corner.

" That you, Mr. Ingpen ? "

Said a blithe voice :

" How d'ye do, host ? When you've known me a bit longer you'll learn that I always manage to arrive just when other people are leaving."

## CHAPTER V

### TERTIUS INGPEN

#### I

**T**ERTIUS INGPEN was the new District Factory Inspector, a man of about thirty-five, neither fair nor dark, neither tall nor short. He was a native of the district, having been born somewhere in the aristocratic regions between Knype and the lordly village of Sneyd, but what first struck the local observer in him was that his speech had none of the local accent. In the pursuit of his vocation he had lived in other places than the Five Towns. For example, in London, where he had become acquainted with Edwin's friend, Charlie Orgreave, the doctor. When Ingpen received a goodish appointment amid the industrial horrors of his birth, Charlie Orgreave recommended him to Edwin, and Edwin and Ingpen had met once, under arrangement made by Johnnie Orgreave. It was Johnnie who had impulsively suggested in Ingpen's presence that Ingpen should be invited to the At Home. Edwin, rather intimidated by Ingpen's other-worldliness, had said: "You'll run up against a mixed lot." But Ingpen, though sternly critical of local phenomena, seemed to be ready to meet social adventures in a broad and even eager spirit of curiosity concerning mankind. He was not uncomely, and he possessed a short silky beard of which secretly he was not less proud than of his striking name. He wore a neat blue suit, with the trousers fastened tightly round the ankles for bicycle-riding, and thick kid gloves. He took off one glove to shake hands, and then, having leisurely removed the other, and talking all the time, he bent down with care and loosed his trousers and shook them into shape.

"Now what about this jigger?" he asked, while still bending. "I don't care to leave it anywhere. It's a good jigger."



As it leaned on one pedal against the kerb of Hulton Street, the strange-looking jigger appeared to be at any rate a very dirty jigger. Fastened under the saddle were a roll of paper and a mackintosh.

"There are one or two ordinaries knocking about the place," said Edwin, "but we haven't got a proper bicycle-house. I'll find a place for it somewhere in the garden." He lifted the front wheel.

"Don't trouble, please. I'll take it," said Ingpen, and before picking up the machine blew out the lamp, whose extinction left a great darkness down the slope of Hulton Street.

"You've got a very nice place here. Too central for me, of course!" Ingpen began, after they had insinuated the bicycle through narrow paths to the back of the house.

Edwin was leading him along the side of the lawn farthest away from Trafalgar Road. Certainly the property had the air of being a very nice place. The garden with its screen of high rustling trees seemed spacious and mysterious in the gloom, and the lighted windows of the house produced an effect of much richness—especially the half-open window of the drawing-room. Fearn and Cheswardine were standing in front of it chatting (doubtless of affairs) with that important adult air which Edwin himself could never successfully imitate. Behind them were bright women, and the brilliant chandelier. The piano faintly sounded. Edwin was proud of his very nice place. "How strange!" he thought. "This is all mine! These are my guests! And my wife is mine!"

"Well, you see," he answered Ingpen's criticism with false humility, "I've no choice. I've got to be central."

Ingpen answered pleasantly:

"I take your word for it; but I don't see."

The bicycle was carefully bestowed by its groping owner in a small rustic arbour which, situated almost under the wall that divided the Clayhanger property from the first cottage in Hulton Street, was hidden from the house by a clump of bushes.

In the dark privacy of this shelter Tertius Ingpen said in a reflective tone:

"I understand that you haven't been married long, and

that this is a sort of function to inform the world officially that you're no longer what you were? "

" It's something like that," Edwin admitted with a laugh.

He liked the quiet intimacy of Ingpen's voice, whose delicate inflexions indicated highly cultivated sensibilities. And he thought : " I believe I shall be friends with this chap." And was glad, and faith in Ingpen was planted in his heart.

" Well," Ingpen continued, " I wish you happiness. It may seem a strange thing to say to a man in your position, but my opinion is that the proper place for women is—behind the veil. Only my personal opinion, of course ! But I'm entitled to hold it, and therefore to express it." Whatever his matter, his manner was faultless.

" Yes ? " Edwin murmured awkwardly. What on earth did Ingpen expect by way of reply to such a proposition ? Surely Ingpen should have known that he was putting his host in a disagreeable difficulty. His new-born faith in Ingpen felt the harsh wind of experience and shivered. Nevertheless, there was a part of Edwin that responded to Ingpen's attitude. " Behind the veil." Yes, something could be said for the proposition.

They left the arbour in silence. They had not gone more than a few steps when a boy's shrill voice made itself heard over the wall of the cottage yard.

" O Lord, Thou 'ast said ' If two on ye sh'll agray on earth as touching onything that they sh'll ask it sh'll be done for them of My Father which is in 'eaven. For where two or three are gathered together i' My name theer am I in th' midst of 'em.' O Lord, George Edwin Clay'anger wants a two-bladed penknife. We all three on us want Ye to send George Edwin Clay'anger a two-bladed penknife." The words fell with impressive effect on the men in the garden.

" What the——? " Edwin exclaimed.

" Hsh ! " Ingpen stopped him in an excited whisper. " Don't disturb them for anything in the world ! "

Silence followed.

Edwin crept away like a scout towards a swing which he had erected for his friend George before he became the husband of George's mother. He climbed into it and over the wall could just see three boys' heads in the yard illuminated by a

lamp in the back window of the cottage. Tertius Ingpen joined him, but immediately climbed higher on to the horizontal beam of the swing.

"Who are they?" Ingpen asked, restraining his joy in the adventure.

"The one on the right's my stepson. The other big one is my sister Clara's child, Bert. I expect the little one's old Clowes', the gravedigger's kid. They say he's a regular little parson—probably to make up for his parents. I expect they're out somewhere having a jollification."

"Well," Ingpen breathed. "I wouldn't have missed this for a good deal." He gave a deep, almost soundless giggle.

Edwin was startled—as much as anything by the extraordinary deceitfulness of George. Who could possibly have guessed from the boy's demeanour when his Aunt Clara mentioned Bert to him, that he had made an outrageous rendezvous with Bert that very night? Certainly he had blushed, but then he often blushed. Of course, the Benbows would assert that George had seduced the guileless Bert. Fancy them hunting the town for Bert at that instant! As regards Peter Clowes, George, though not positively forbidden to do so, had been warned against associating with him—chiefly because of the bad influence which Peter's accent would have on George's accent. His mother had said that she could not understand how George could wish to be friendly with a rough little boy like Peter. Edwin, however, inexperienced as he was, had already comprehended that children, like Eastern women, have no natural class bias; and he could not persuade himself to be the first to inculcate into George ideas which could only be called snobbish. He was a democrat. Nevertheless he did not like George to play with Peter Clowes.

The small Peter, with uplifted face and clasped hands, repeated urgently, passionately:

"O God! We all three on us want Ye to send George Edwin Clay'anger a two-bladed penknife. Now, lads, kneel, and all three on us together!"

He stood between the taller and better-dressed boys unashamed, fervent, a born religionist. He was not even praying for himself. He was praying out of his profound impersonal interest in the efficacy of prayer.

The three boys, kneeling, and so disappearing from sight behind the wall, repeated together.

"O God! Please send George Edwin Clayhanger a two-bladed penknife."

Then George and Bert stood up again, shuffling about. Peter Clowes did not reappear.

"I can't help it," whispered Ingpen in a strange moved voice, "I've got to be God. Here goes! And it's practically new, too!"

Edwin in the darkness could see him feeling in his waistcoat pocket, and then raise his arm, and, taking careful aim, throw in the direction of the dimly lighted yard.

"Oh!" came the cry of George, in sudden pain.

The descending penknife had hit him.

There was a scramble on the pavement of the yard, and some muttered talk. The group went to the back window where the lamp was and examined the heavenly penknife. They were more frightened than delighted by the miracle. The unseen watchers in the swing were also rather frightened, as though they had interfered irremediably in a solemn and delicate crisis beyond their competence. In a curious way they were ashamed.

"Yes, and what about me?" said the voice of fat Bert Benbow sulkily. "This is all very well. But what about me? Ye tried without me and ye couldn't do anything. Now I've come and ye've done it. What am I going to get? Ye've got to give me something instead of a half-share in that penknife, George."

George said:

"Let's pray for something for you now. What d'you want?"

"I want a bicycle. Ye know what I want."

"Oh, no, you don't, Bert Benbow!" said George. "You've got to want something safer than a bike. Suppose it comes tumbling down like the penknife did! We shall be damn well killed."

Tertius Ingpen could not suppress a snorting giggle.

"I want a bike," Bert insisted. "And I don't want nothing else."

The two bigger boys moved vaguely away from the window,

and the little religionist followed them in silence, ready to supplicate for whatever they should decide.

"All right," George agreed. "We'll pray for a bicycle. But we'd better all stand as close as we can to the wall, under the spouting, in case."

The ceremonial was recommenced.

"No," Ingpen murmured, "I'm not being God this time. It won't run to it."

Footsteps were heard on the lawn behind the swing. Ingpen slid down and Edwin jumped down. Johnnie Orgreave was approaching.

"Hsh!" Ingpen warned him.

"What are you chaps——"

"Hsh!" Ingpen was more imperative.

All three men walked away out of earshot of the yard, towards the window of the drawing-room—Johnnie Orgreave mystified, the other two smiling but with spirits disturbed. Johnnie heard the story in brief; it was told to him in confidence, as Tertius Ingpen held firmly that eavesdroppers, if they had any honour left, should at least hold their tongues.

## II

When Tertius Ingpen was introduced to Hilda in the drawing-room, the three men having entered by the French window, Edwin was startled and relieved by the deportment of the Orientalist who thought that the proper place for women was behind the veil. In his simplicity he had assumed that the Orientalist would indicate his attitude by a dignified reserve. Not at all! As soon as Ingpen reached Hilda's hospitable gaze his whole bearing altered. He bowed, with a deferential bending that to an untravelled native must have seemed exaggerated; his face was transformed by a sweet smile; his voice became the voice of a courtier; he shook hands with chivalrous solicitude for the fragile hand shaken. Hilda was pleased by him, perceiving that this man was more experienced in the world than any of the other worldly guests. She liked that. Ingpen's new symptoms were modified after a few moments, but when he was presented to Mrs. Fearn he reproduced them in their original intensity, and again when he was introduced to Vera Cheswardine.



"Been out without your cap?" Hilda questioned Edwin, lifting her eyebrows. She said it in order to say something, for the entry of this ceremonious personage, who held all the advantages of the native and of the stranger, had a little overpowered the company.

"Only just to see after Mr. Ingpen's machine. Give me your cap, Mr. Ingpen. I'll hang it up."

When he returned to the drawing-room from the hatstand, Ingpen was talking with Janet Orgreave, whom he already knew.

"Have you seen George, Edwin?" Hilda called across the drawing-room.

"Hasn't he gone to bed?"

"That's what I want to know. I haven't seen him lately."

Every one, except Johnnie Orgreave and a Swetnam or so, was preoccupied by the thought of children, by the thought of this incalculable and disturbing race that with different standards and ideals lived so mysteriously in and among their adult selves. Nothing was said about the strange disappearance of Bert Benbow, but each woman had it in mind, and coupled it with Hilda's sudden apprehension concerning George, and imagined weird connections between the one and the other, and felt forebodings about children nearer to her own heart. Children dominated the assemblage and, made restless, the assemblage collectively felt that the moment for separation approached. The At Home was practically over.

Hilda rang the bell, and as she did so Johnnie Orgreave winked dangerously at Edwin, who with sternness responded. He wondered why he should thus deceive his wife, with whom he was so deliciously intimate. He thought also that women were capricious in their anxieties, and yet now and then their moods—once more by the favour of hazard—displayed a marvellous appositeness. Hilda had no reason whatever for worrying more about George on this night than on any other night. Nevertheless this night happened to be the night on which anxiety would be justified.

"Ada," said Hilda to the entering servant. "Have you seen Master George?"

"No'm," Ada replied, almost defiantly.

"When did you see him last?"

"I don't remember, m'm."

"Is he in bed?"

"I don't know, m'm."

"Just go and see, will you?"

"Yes'm."

The company waited with gentle concealed excitement for the returning Ada, who announced:

"His bedroom door's locked, m'm."

"He *will* lock it sometimes, although I've positively forbidden him to. But what are you to do?" said Hilda smilingly to the other mothers.

"Take the key away, obviously," Tertius Ingpen answered the question, turning quickly and interrupting his chat with Janet Orgreave.

"That ought not to be necessary," said Fearn, as an expert father.

Ada departed, thankful to be finished with the ordeal of cross-examination in a full drawing-room.

"Don't *you* know anything about him?" Hilda addressed Johnnie Orgreave suddenly.

"Me? About your precious? No. Why should I know?"

"Because you're getting such friends, you two."

"Oh! Are we?" Johnnie said carelessly. Nevertheless he was flattered by a certain nascent admiration on the part of George, which was then beginning to be noticeable.

A quarter of an hour later, when several guests had gone, Hilda murmured to Edwin:

"I'm not easy about that boy. I'll just run upstairs."

"I shouldn't," said Edwin.

But she did. And the distant sound of knocking, and "George, George," could be heard even down in the hall.

"I can't wake him," said Hilda, back in the drawing-room.

"What do you want to wake him for, foolish girl?" Edwin demanded.

She enjoyed being called 'foolish girl,' but she was not to be tranquillized.

"Do you think he *is* in bed?" she questioned, before the whole remaining company, and the dread suspicion was out!

After more journeys upstairs, and more bangings, and essays with keys, and even attempts at lock-picking, Hilda announced that George's room must be besieged from its window. A ladder was found, and interested visitors went into the back entry, by the kitchen, to see it reared and hear the result. Edwin thought that the cook in the kitchen looked as guilty as he himself felt, though she more than once asseverated her belief that Master George was safely in bed. The ladder was too short. Edwin mounted it and tried to prise himself on to the window-sill, but could not.

"Here, let me try!" said Ingpen, joyous.

Ingpen easily succeeded. He glanced through the open window into George's bedroom, and then looked down at the upturned faces, and Ada's apron, whitely visible in the gloom.

"He's here all right."

"Oh, good!" said Hilda. "Is he asleep?"

"Yes."

"He deserves to be wakened," she laughed.

"You see what a foolish girl you've been," said Edwin affectionately.

"Never mind!" she retorted. "*You* couldn't get on the window. And you were just as upset as anybody. Do you think I don't know? Thank you, Mr. Ingpen."

"Is he really there?" Edwin whispered to Ingpen as soon as he could.

"Yes. And asleep, too!"

"I wonder how the deuce he slipped in. I'll bet anything those servants have been telling a lot of lies for him. He pulls their hair down and simply does what he likes with them."

Edwin was now greatly reassured, but he could not quite recover from the glimpse he had had of George's capacity for leading a double life. Sardonically he speculated whether the heavenly penknife would be brought to his notice by its owner, and if so by what ingenious method.

### III

The final sensation was caused by the arrival, in a nearly empty drawing-room, of plump Maggie, nervous, constrained, and somewhat breathless.

"Bert has turned up," she said. "Clara thought I'd better come along and tell you. She felt sure you'd like to know."

"Well, that's all right then," Hilda replied perfunctorily, indicating that Clara's conceited assumption of a universal interest in her dull children was ridiculous.

Edwin asked :

"Did the kid say where he'd been ? "

"Been running about the streets. They don't know what's come over him—because, you see, he'd actually gone to bed once. Albert is quite puzzled ; but he says he'll have it out of him before he's done."

"When he does get it out of him," thought Edwin again, "there will be a family row and George will be indicted as the corrupter of innocence."

Maggie would not stay a single moment. Hilda attentively accompanied her to the hall. The former and the present mistress of the house kissed with the conventional signs of affection. But the fact that one had succeeded the other seemed to divide them. Hilda was always lying in wait for criticism from Maggie, ready to resent it ; Maggie divined this and said never a word. The silence piqued Hilda as much as outspoken criticism would have annoyed her. She could not bear it.

"How do you like my new stair-carpet ? " she demanded defiantly.

"Very nice ! Very nice, I'm sure ! " Maggie replied without conviction. And added, just as she stepped outside the front-door, "You've made a lot of changes." This was the mild, good-natured girl's sole thrust, and it was as effective as she could have wished.

Everybody had gone except the two Orgreaves and Tertius Ingpen.

"I don't know about you, Johnnie, but I must go," said Janet Orgreave when Hilda came back.

"Hold on, Jan ! " Johnnie protested. "You're forgetting those duets you are to try with Ingpen."

"Really ? "

"Duets ! " cried Hilda, instantly uplifted and enthusiastic. "Oh, do let's have some music ! "

Ingpen, by arrangement with the Orgreaves, had brought some pianoforte duets. They were tied to his bicycle. He was known as an amateur of music. Edwin, bidding Ingpen not to move, ran out into the garden to get the music from the bicycle. Johnnie ran after him through the French window.

"I say!" Johnnie called in a low voice.

"What's up?" Edwin stopped for him.

"I've a piece of news for you. About that land you've set your heart on, down at Shawport! . . . It can be bought cheap—at least the old man says it's cheap—whatever his opinion may be worth. I was telling him about your scheme for having a new printing works altogether. Astonishing how keen he is! If I'd had a plan of the land I believe he'd have sat down and made sketches at once."

Johnnie (with his brother Jimmie) was in partnership with old Orgreave as an architect.

"'Set my heart on?'" Edwin mumbled, intimidated as usual by a nearer view of an enterprise which he had himself conceived and which had enchanted him from afar.

"'Set my heart on?'"

"Well, had you, or hadn't you?"

"I suppose I had," Edwin admitted. "Look here, I'll drop in and see you to-morrow morning."

"Right!"

Together they detached the music from the bicycle, and, as Edwin unrolled it and rolled it the other side out to flatten it, they returned silently through the dark wind-stirred garden into the drawing-room.

There were now the two Orgreaves, Tertius Ingpen, and Hilda and Edwin in the drawing-room.

"We will now begin the evening," said Ingpen, as he glanced at the music.

All five were conscious of the pleasant feeling of freedom, intimacy, and mutual comprehension which animates a small company that by self-selection has survived out of a larger one. The lateness of the hour aided their zest. Even the more staid among them perceived, as by a revelation, that it did not in fact matter, once in a way, if they *were* tired and inefficient on the morrow, and that too much regularity of habit was bad for the soul. Edwin had brought in a tray



from the dining-room, and rearranged the chairs according to Hilda's caprice, and was providing cushions to raise the bodies of the duet-players to the proper height. Janet began to excuse herself, asserting that if there was one member of her family who could not play duets, she was that member, that she had never seen this Dvorak music before, and that if they had got her brother Tom, or her elder sister Marion, or even Alicia,—etc., etc.

"We are quite accustomed to these formal preliminaries from duet-players, Miss Orgreave," said Ingpen. "I never do them myself,—not because I can play well, but because I am hardened. Now shall we start? Will you take the treble or the bass?"

Janet answered with eager modesty that she would take the bass.

"It's all one to me," said Ingpen, putting on spectacles, "I play either equally badly. You'll soon regret leaving the most important part to me. However . . . ! Clayhanger, will you turn over?"

"Er—yes," said Edwin boldly. "But you'd better give me the tip."

He knew a little about printed music, from his experiences as a boy when his sisters used to sing two-part songs. That is to say, he had a vague idea 'where a player was' on a page. But the enterprise of turning over Dvorak's "Legends" seemed to him critically adventurous. Dvorak was nothing but a name to him; beyond the correct English method of pronouncing that name he had no knowledge whatever of the subject in hand.

Then the performance of the "Legends" began. Despite halts, hesitations, occasional loud insistent chanting of the time, explanations between the players, many wrong notes by Ingpen, and a few wrong notes by Janet, and one or two enormous misapprehensions by Edwin, the performance was a success, in that it put a spell on its public, and permitted the loose and tender genius of Dvorak to dominate the room.

"Play that again, will you?" said Hilda, in a low dramatic voice, at the third "Legend."

"We will," Ingpen answered; "and we'll play it better.

Edwin had the exquisite sensation of partially compre-

hending music whose total beauty was beyond the limitations of his power to enjoy—power, nevertheless, which seemed to grow each moment. Passages entirely intelligible and lovely would break at intervals through the veils of general sound and ravish him. All his attention was intensely concentrated on the page. He could hear Ingpen breathing hard. Out of the corner of his eye he was aware of Johnnie Orgreave on the sofa making signs to Hilda about drinks, and pouring out something for her, and something for himself, without the faintest noise. And he was aware of Ada coming to the open door and being waved away to bed by her mistress.

"Well," he said, when the last "Legend" was played. "That's a bit of the right sort—no mistake." He was obliged to be banal and colloquial.

Hilda said nothing at all. Johnnie, who had waited for the end in order to strike a match, showed by two words that he was an expert listener to duets. Tertius Ingpen was very excited and pleased. "More tricky than difficult, isn't it—to read?" he said privately to his fellow-performer, who concurred. Janet also was excited in her fashion. But even amid the general excitement Ingpen had to be judicious.

"Delightful stuff, of course," he said, pulling his beard. "But he's not a great composer, you know, all the same."

"He'll do to be going on with," Johnnie murmured.

"Oh, yes! Delightful! Delightful!" Ingpen repeated warmly, removing his spectacles. "What a pity we can't have musical evenings regularly!"

"But we can!" said Hilda positively. "Let's have them here—every week!"

"A great scheme!" Edwin agreed with enthusiasm, admiring his wife's initiative. He had been a little afraid that the episode of George had upset her for the night, but he now saw that she had perfectly recovered from it.

"Oh!" Ingpen paused. "I doubt if I could come every week. I could come once a fortnight."

"Well, once a fortnight then!" said Hilda.

"I suppose Sunday wouldn't suit you?"

Edwin challenged him almost fiercely:

"Why won't it suit us? It will suit us first-class."

Ingpen merely said, with quiet delicacy:

"So much the better. . . . We might go all through the Mozart fiddle sonatas."

"And who's your violinist?" asked Johnnie.

"I am, if you don't mind." Ingpen smiled. "If your sister will take the piano part."

Hilda exclaimed admiringly:

"Do you play the violin, too, Mr. Ingpen?"

"I scrape it. Also the tenor. But my real instrument is the clarinet." He laughed. "It seems odd," he went on with genuine scientific unegotistic interest in himself, "but d'you know, I thoroughly enjoy playing the clarinet in a bad orchestra whenever I get the chance. When I happen to have a free evening I often wish I could drop in at a theatre and play rotten music in the band. It's better than nothing. Some of us are born mad."

"But, Mr. Ingpen," said Janet Orgreave anxiously, after this speech had been appreciated, "I have never played those Mozart sonatas."

"I'm glad to hear it," he replied, with admirable tranquillity. "Neither have I. I've often meant to. It'll be quite a sporting event. But of course we can have a rehearsal if you like."

The project of the musical evenings was discussed and discussed until Janet, having vanished silently upstairs, reappeared with her hat and cloak on.

"I can go alone if you aren't ready, Johnnie," said she.

Johnnie yawned.

"No. I'm coming."

"I also must go—I suppose," said Ingpen.

They all went into the hall. Through the open door of the dining-room, where one gas-jet burned, could be seen the rich remains of what had been 'light refreshments' in the most generous interpretation of the term.

Ingpen stopped to regard the spectacle, fingering his beard.

"I was just wondering," he remarked, with that strange eternal curiosity about himself, "whether I'd had enough to eat. I've got to ride home."

"Well, what have you had?" Johnnie quizzed him.

"I haven't had anything," said Ingpen, "except drink."

Hilda cried:

"Oh, you poor sufferer! I am ashamed!" and led him familiarly to the table.

## IV

Edwin was kept at the front-door some time by Johnnie Orgreave, who resumed, as he was departing, the subject of the proposed new works, and maintained it at such length that Janet, tired of waiting on the pavement, said that she would walk on. When he returned to the dining-room, Ingpen and Hilda were sitting side by side at the little table, and the first words that Edwin heard were from Ingpen:

"It cost me a penknife, but it was dirt cheap at the price. You can't expect to be the Almighty for much less than a penknife." Seeing Edwin, he added, with a nonchalant smile: "I've told Mrs. Clayhanger all about the answer to prayer. I thought she ought to know."

Edwin laughed awkwardly, saying to himself:

"Ingpen, my boy, you ought to have thought of my position first. You've been putting your finger into a rather delicate piece of mechanism. Supposing she cuts up rough with me afterwards for hiding it from her all this time! . . . I'm living with her. You aren't."

"Of course," Ingpen added, "I've sworn the lady to secrecy."

Hilda said:

"I knew all the time there was something wrong."

And Edwin thought:

"No, you didn't. And if he hadn't happened to tell you about the thing, you'd have been convinced that you'd been alarming yourself for nothing."

But he only said, not certain of Hilda's humour, and anxious to placate her:

"There's no doubt George ought to be punished."

"Nothing of the kind! Nothing of the kind!" Ingpen vivaciously protested. "Why, bless my soul! The kids were engaged in a religious work! They were busy with some one far more important than any parents." And after a pause, reflectively: "Curious thing the mentality of a child! I doubt if we understand anything about it."

Hilda smiled, but said naught.

"May I inquire what there is in that bottle?" Ingpen asked.

"Benedictine."

"Have some, Mr. Ingpen?"

"I will if you will, Mrs. Clayhanger."

Edwin raised his eyebrows at his wife.

"You needn't look at me!" said Hilda. "I'm going to have some."

Ingpen smacked his lips over the liqueur.

"It's a very bad thing late at night, of course. But I believe in giving your stomach something to think about. I never allow my digestive apparatus to boss me."

"Quite right, Mr. Ingpen."

They touched glasses, without a word, almost instinctively.

"Well," thought Edwin, "for a chap who thinks women ought to be behind the veil . . . !"

"Be a man, Clayhanger, and have some."

Edwin shook his head.

With a scarcely perceptible movement of her glass, Hilda greeted her husband, peeping out at him as it were for a fraction of a second in a glint of affection. He was quite happy. They were all seated close together, Edwin opposite the other two at the large table. The single gas-jet by the very inadequacy with which it lighted the scene of disorder, produced an effect of informal homeliness and fellowship that warmed the heart. Each of the three realized with pleasure that a new and promising friendship was in the making. They talked at length about the Musical Evenings, and Edwin said that he should buy some music, and Hilda asked him to obtain a history of music that Ingpen described with some enthusiasm, and the date of the first evening was settled,—Sunday week. And after uncounted minutes Ingpen remarked that he presumed he had better go.

"I have to cycle home," he announced once more.

"To-night?" Hilda exclaimed.

"No. This morning."

"All the way to Axe?"

"Oh, no! I'm three miles this side of Axe. It's only six and a half miles."



"But all those hills!"

"Pooh! Excellent for the muscles of the calf."

"Do you live alone, Mr. Ingpen?"

"I have a sort of housekeeper."

"In a cottage?"

"In a cottage."

"But what do you *do*—all alone?"

"I cultivate myself."

And Hilda, in a changed tone, said:

"How wise you are!"

"Rather inconvenient, being out there, isn't it?" Edwin suggested.

"It may be inconvenient sometimes for my job, but I can't help that. I give the State what I consider fair value for the money it pays me, and not a grain more. I've got myself to think about. There are some things I won't do, and one of them is to live all the time in a vile hole like the Five Towns. I won't do it. I'd sooner be a blooming peasant on the land."

As he was a native he had the right to criticize the district without protest from other natives.

"You're quite right as to the vile hole," said Hilda with conviction.

"I don't know——" Edwin muttered. "I think old Bosley isn't so bad."

"Yes. But you're an old stick-in-the-mud, dearest," said Hilda. "Mr. Ingpen has lived away from the district, and so have I. You haven't. You're no judge. We know, don't we, Mr. Ingpen?"

When, Ingpen having at last accumulated sufficient resolution to move and get his cap, they went through the drawing-room to the garden, they found that rain was falling.

"Never mind," said Ingpen, lifting his head sardonically in a mute indictment of the heavens. "I have my mack."

Edwin searched out the bicycle and brought it to the window, and Hilda stuck a hat on his head. Leisurely Ingpen clipped his trousers at the ankle, and unstrapped a mackintosh cape from the machine, and folded the strap. Leisurely he put on the cape, and gazed at the impenetrable heavens again.

"I can make you up a bed, Mr. Ingpen."

"No thanks. Oh, no thanks! The fact is, I rather like rain."

Leisurely he took a box of fusees from his pocket, and lighted his lamp, examining it as though it contained some hidden and perilous defect. Then he pressed the tyres.

"The back tyre'll do with a little more air," he said thoughtfully. "I don't know if my pump will work."

It did work, but slowly. After which, gloves had to be assumed.

"I suppose I can get out this way. Oh! My music! Never mind, I'll leave it."

Then, with a sudden access of ceremoniousness, he bade adieu to Hilda; no detail of punctilio was omitted from the formality.

"Good-bye. Many thanks."

"Good-bye. Thank *you*!"

Edwin preceded the bicyclist and the bicycle round the side of the house to the front-gate at the corner of Hulton Street and Trafalgar Road.

In the solemn and chill nocturnal solitude of rain-swept Hulton Street, Ingpen straddled the bicycle, with his left foot on one raised pedal and the other on the pavement; and then held out a gloved hand to Edwin.

"Good-bye, old chap. See you soon."

Much goodwill and appreciation and hope was implicit in that rather casual handshake.

He sheered off strongly down the dark slope of Hulton Street in the rain, using his ankles with skill in the pedal-stroke. The man's calves seemed to be enormously developed. The cape ballooned out behind his swiftness, and in a moment he had swerved round the flickering mournful gas-lamp at the bottom of the mean new street and was gone.

## CHAPTER VI

### HUSBAND AND WIFE

#### I

"I'M upstairs," Hilda called in a powerful whisper from the head of the stairs as soon as Edwin had closed and bolted the front-door.

He responded humorously. He felt very happy, lusty, and wideawake. The evening had had its contretemps, its varying curve of success, but as a whole it was a triumph. And, above all, it was over—a thing that had had to be accomplished, and that had been accomplished, with dignity and effectiveness. He walked in ease from room to lighted empty room, and the splendid waste of gas pleased him, arousing something royal that is at the bottom of generous natures. In the breakfast-room especially the gas had been flaring to no purpose for hours. "*Her* room, her very own room!" He wondered indulgently when, if ever, she would really make it her own room by impressing her individuality upon it. He knew she was always meaning to do something drastic to the room, but so far she had got no further than his portrait. Child! Infant! Wayward girl! . . . Still the fact of the portrait on the mantelpiece touched him.

He dwelt tenderly on the invisible image of the woman upstairs. It was marvellous how she was not the Hilda he had married. The new Hilda had so overlaid and hidden the old, that he had positively to make an effort to recall what the old one was, with her sternness and her anxious air of responsibility. But at the same time she was the old Hilda too. He desired to be splendidly generous, to environ her with all luxuries, to lift her clear above other women; he desired the means to be senselessly extravagant for her. To clasp on her arm a bracelet whose cost would keep a working man's family for three years would have delighted him. And though

he was interested in social schemes, and had a social conscience, he would sooner have bought that bracelet, and so purchased the momentary thrill of putting it on her capricious arm, than have helped to ameliorate the lot of thousands of victimized human beings. He had Hilda in his bones and he knew it, and he knew that it was a grand and a painful thing.

Nevertheless he was not without a considerable self-satisfaction, for he had done very well by Hilda. He had found her at the mercy of the world, and now she was safe and sheltered and beloved, and made mistress of a house and home that would stand comparison with most houses and homes. He was proud of his house; he always watched over it; he was always improving it; and he would improve it more and more; and it should never be quite finished.

The disorder in it, now, irked him. He walked to and fro, and restored every piece of furniture to its proper place, heaped the contents of the ash-trays into one large ash-tray, covered some of the food, and locked up the alcohol. He did this leisurely, while thinking of the woman upstairs, and while eating two chocolates,—not more, because he had notions about his stomach. Then he shut and bolted the drawing-room window, and opened the door leading to the cellar steps and sniffed, so as to be quite certain that the radiator furnace was not setting the house on fire. And then he extinguished the lights, and the hall-light last of all, and his sole illumination was the gas on the first-floor landing inviting him upstairs.

Standing on the dark stairs, eager and yet reluctant to mount, he realized the entity of the house. He thought of the astounding and mysterious George, and of those uncomprehended beings, Ada and the cook in their attic, sleeping by the side of the portrait of a fireman in uniform. He felt sure that one or both of them had been privy to George's unlawful adventures, and he heartily liked them for shielding the boy. And he thought of his wife, moving about in the bedroom upon which she *had* impressed her individuality. He went upstairs. . . . Yes, he should proceed with the enterprise of the new works. He had the courage for it now. He was rich, according to Bursley ideas,—he would be far richer. . . .

He gave a faint laugh at the memory of George's objection to Bert's choice of a bicycle as a gift from heaven.

## II

Hilda was brushing her hair. The bedroom seemed to be full of her and the disorder of her multitudinous things. Whenever he asked why a particular item of her goods was in a particular spot—the spot appearing to him to have been bizarrely chosen—she always proved to her own satisfaction, by a quite improvised argument—that that particular spot was the sole possible spot for that particular item. The bedroom was no longer theirs—it was hers. He picnicked in it. He didn't mind. In fact he rather liked the picnic. It pleased him to exercise his talent for order and organization, so as to maintain his own comfort in the small spaces which she left to him. To-night the room was in a divine confusion. He accepted it with pleasure. The beds had not been turned down, because it was improper to turn them down when they were to be used for the deposit of strangers' finery. On Edwin's bed now lay the dress which Hilda had taken off. It was a most agreeable object on the bed, and seemed even richer and more complex there than on Hilda. He removed it carefully to a chair. An antique diaphanous shawl remained which was unfamiliar to him.

"What's this shawl?" he asked. "I've never seen this shawl before. What is it?"

Hilda was busy, her bent head buried in hair.

"Oh, Edwin, what an old fusser you are!" she mumbled. "What shawl?"

He held it up.

"Some one must have left it."

He proceeded with the turning down of his bed. Then he sat on a chair to regard Hilda.

When she had done her hair she padded across the room and examined the shawl.

"What a precious thing!" she exclaimed. "It's Mrs. Fearn's. She must have taken it off to put her jacket on, and then forgotten it. But I'd no idea how good it was. It's genuine old. I wonder how it would suit me?"



She put it round her shoulders, and then stood smiling, posing, bold, provocative, for his verdict. The whiteness of her deshabelle showed through the delicate pattern and tints of the shawl, with a strange effect. For him she was more than a woman; she was the incarnation of a sex. It was marvellous how all she did, all her ideas and her gestures, were so intensely feminine, so sure to perturb or enchant him. Nervously he began to wind his watch. He wanted to spring up and kiss her because she was herself. But he could not. So he said:

"Come here, chit. Let me look at that shawl."

She obeyed. She knelt acquiescent. He put his watch back into his pocket and fingered the shawl.

Then she said:

"I suppose one'll be allowed to grumble at Georgie for locking his bedroom door." And she said it with a touch of mockery in her clear, precise voice, as though twitting him, and Ingpen too, about their absurd theoretical sense of honour towards children. And there was a touch of fine bitterness in her voice also,—a reminiscence of the old Hilda. Incalculable creature! Who could have guessed that she would make such a remark at such a moment? In his mind he dashed George to pieces. But as a wise male he ignored all her implications and answered casually, mildly, with an affirmative.

She went on:

"What were you talking such a long time to Johnnie Orgreave about?"

"Talking a long time to Johnnie Orgreave? Oh, d'you mean at the front-door? Why, it wasn't half a minute! He happened to mention a piece of land down at Shawport that I had a sort of a notion of buying."

"Buying? What for?" Her tone hardened.

"Well, supposing I had to build a new works?"

"You never told me anything about it."

"I've only just begun to think of it myself. You see, if I'm to go in for lithography as it ought to be gone in for, I can't possibly stay at the shop. I must have more room, and a lot more. And it would be cheaper to build than to rent."

She stood up.

"Why go in more for lithography?"

"You can't stand still in business. Must either go forward or go back."

"It seems to me it's very risky. I wondered what you were hiding from me."

"My dear girl, I was not hiding anything from you," he protested.

"Whose land is it?"

"It belongs to Tobias Hall's estate."

"Yes, and I've no doubt the Halls would be very glad to get rid of it. Who told you about it?"

"Johnnie."

"Of course it would be a fine thing for him too."

"But I'd asked him if he knew of any land going cheap."

She shrugged her shoulders, and shrugged away the disinterestedness of all Orgreaves.

"Anyone could get the better of you," she said.

He resented this estimate of himself as a good-natured simpleton. He assuredly did not want to quarrel, but he was obliged to say:

"Oh! Could they?"

An acerbity scarcely intentional somehow entered into his tone. As soon as he heard it he recognized the tone as the forerunner of altercations.

"Of course!" she insisted, superiorly, and then went on: "We're all right as we are. We spend too much money, but I dare say we're all right. If you go in for a lot of new things you may lose all we've got, and then where shall we be?"

In his heart he said to her:

"What's it got to do with you? You manage your home, and I'll manage my business! You know nothing at all about business. You're the very antithesis of business. Whatever business you've ever had to do with you've ruined. You've no right to judge and no grounds for judgment. It's odious of you to asperse any of the Orgreaves. They were always your best friends. I should never have met you if it hadn't been for them. And where would you be now without me? Trying to run some wretched boarding-house and probably

starving. Why do you assume that I'm a d——d fool? You always do. Let me tell you that I'm one of the most common-sense men in this town, and everybody knows it except you. Anyhow, I was clever enough to get you *out* of a mess. . . . You knew I was hiding something from you, did you? I wish you wouldn't talk such infernal rot. And, moreover, I won't have you interfering in my business. Other wives don't, and you shan't. So let that be clearly understood." In his heart he was very ill-used and very savage.

But he only said:

"Well, we shall see."

She retorted:

"Naturally, if you've made up your mind, there's no more to be said."

He broke out viciously:

"I've not made up my mind. Don't I tell you I've only just begun to think about it?"

He was angry. And now that he actually was angry, he took an almost sensual pleasure in being angry. He had been angry before, though on a smaller scale, with less provocation, and he had sworn that he would never be angry again. But now that he was angry again, he gloomily and fiercely revelled in it.

Hilda silently folded up the shawl, and, putting it into a drawer of the wardrobe, shut the drawer with an irritatingly gentle click. . . . Click! He could have killed her for that click. . . . She seized a dressing-gown.

"I must just go and look at George," she murmured, with cool, clear calmness,—the virtuous, anxious mother; not a trace of coquetry anywhere in her.

"What bosh!" he thought. "She's knows perfectly well George's door is bolted."

Marriage was a startling affair. Who could have foretold this finish to the evening? Nothing had occurred . . . nothing . . . and yet everything. His plans were all awry. He could see naught but trouble.

She was away some time. When she returned, he was in bed, with his face averted. He heard her moving about.

"Will she, or won't she, come and kiss me?" he thought.

She came and kissed him, but it was a meaningless kiss.

"Good-night," she said aloofly.

"'Night."

She slept, but he could not sleep. He kept thinking the same thought: "She's no right whatever. . . . I must say I never bargained for this . . ." etc.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE TRUCE

#### I

NEARLY a week passed. Hilda, in the leisure of a woman of fashion after dinner, was at the piano in the drawing-room. She had not urgent stockings to mend, nor jam to make, nor careless wenches to overlook, nor food to buy, nor accounts to keep, nor a new dress to scheme out of an old one, nor to perform her duty to her neighbour. She had nothing to do. Like Edwin, she could not play the piano, but she had picked up a note here and a note there in the course of her life, and with much labour and many slow hesitations she could puzzle out a chord or a melody from the printed page. She was now exasperatingly spelling with her finger a fragment of melody from one of Dvorak's "Legends,"—a fragment that had inhabited her mind since she first heard it, and that seemed to gather up and state all the sweet heart-breaking intolerable melancholy implicit in the romantic existence of that city on the map, Prague. On the previous day she had been a quarter of an hour identifying the unforgettable, indissmissible fragment amid the multitude of notes. Now she had recognizably pieced its phrases together, and as her stiff finger stumbled through it, her ears heard it once more ; and she could not repeat it often enough. What she heard was not what she was playing, but something finer—her souvenir of what Tertius Ingpen had played ; and something finer than that, something finer than the greatest artist could possibly play—magic !

It was in the nature of a miracle to her that she had been able to reproduce the souvenir in physical sound. She was proud of herself as a miracle-worker, and somewhat surprised. And at the same time she was abject because she ' could not



play the piano.' She thought that she would be ready to sacrifice many happinesses in order to be able to play as well as even Georgie played, that she would exchange all her own gifts multiplied by a hundred in order to be able to play as Janet Orgreave played, and that to be a world-renowned pianist dominating immense audiences in European capitals must mean the summit of rapture and glory. (She had never listened to a world-renowned pianist.) Meanwhile, without the ennui and slavery of practice, she was enchanting herself; and she savoured her idleness, and thought of her young pretty servants at work, and her boy loose and at large, and her husband keeping her, and of the intensity of beautiful sorrow palpitating behind the mediaeval façades of Prague. Had Ingpen overheard her, he might have demanded: "Who is making that infernal noise on the piano?"

Edwin came into the room, holding a thick green book. He ought long ago to have been back at the works (or 'shop' as it was still called, because it had once been principally a shop), keeping her.

"Hello!" she murmured, without glancing away from the piano. "I thought you were gone."

They had not quarrelled; but they had not made peace; and the open question of lithography and the new works still separated them. Sometimes they had approached each other, pretending amiably or even affectionately that there was no open question. But the reality of the question could not be destroyed by any pretence of ignoring it.

While gazing at the piano, Hilda could also see Edwin. She thought she knew him, but she was always making discoveries in this branch of knowledge. Now and then she was so bewildered by discoveries that she came to wonder why she had married him, and why people do marry—really! The fact was that she had married him for the look in his eyes. It was a sad look, and beyond that it could not be described. Also, a little, she had married him for his bright untidy hair, and for that short oblique shake of the head which, with him, meant a greeting or an affirmative. She had not married him for his sentiments nor for his goodness of heart. Some points in him she did not like. He had a tendency to colds, and she hated him whenever he had a cold. She often

detested his terrible tidiness, though it was a convenient failing. More and more she herself wilfully enjoyed being untidy, as her mother had been untidy. . . . And to think that her mother's untidiness used to annoy her ! On the other hand, she found pleasure in humouring Edwin's crotchety-ness in regard to the details of a meal. She did not like his way of walking, which was ungainly, nor his way of standing, which was infirm. She preferred him to be seated. She could not but regret his irresolution and his love of ease. However, the look in his eyes was paramount, because she was in love with him. She knew that he was more deeply and helplessly in love with her than she with him, but even she was perhaps tightlier bound than in her pride she thought.

Her love had the maladies of a woman's love when it is great ; these may possibly be also the maladies of a man's love. It could be bitter. Certainly it could never rest from criticism, spoken or unspoken. In the presence of others she would criticize him to herself, if not aloud, nearly all the time ; the ordeal was continuous. When she got him alone she would often endow him at a stroke with perfection, and her tenderness would pour over him. She trusted him profoundly ; and yet she had constant misgivings, which weakened or temporarily destroyed her confidence. She would treat a statement from him with almost hostile caution, and accept blindly the very same statement from a stranger ! Her habit was to assume that in any encounter between him and a stranger he would be worsted. She was afraid for him. She felt that she could protect him better than he could protect himself—against any danger whatever. This instinct to protect him was also the instinct of self-protection ; for peril to him meant peril to her. And she had had enough of peril. After years of disastrous peril she was safe and George was safe. And if she was passionately in love with Edwin, she was also passionately in love with safety. She had breathed a long sigh of relief, and from a desperate self-defender had become a woman. She lay back, as it were, luxuriously on a lounge, after exhausting and horrible exertions ; she had scarcely ceased to pant. At the least sign of recurring danger all her nerves were on the *qui vive*. Hence her inimical attitude towards the project of the new works

and the extension of lithography in Bursley. The simpleton (a moment earlier the perfect man) might ruin himself—and her! In her view he was the last person to undertake such an enterprise.

Since her marriage, Clara, Maggie, and Auntie Hamps had been engaged in the pleasant endless task of telling her all about everything that related to the family, and she had been permitted to understand that Edwin, though utterly admirable, was not of a creative disposition, and that he had done nothing but conserve what his father had left. Without his father Edwin 'would have been in a very different position.' She believed this. Every day, indeed, Edwin, by the texture of his hourly life, proved the truth of it. . . . All the persons standing to make a profit out of the new project would get the better of his fine ingenuous temperament—naturally! She knew the world. Did Edwin suppose that she did not know what the world was? . . . And then the interminable worry of the new enterprise—misgivings, uncertainties, extra work, secret preoccupations! What room for love, what hope of tranquillity in all that? He might argue—— But she did not want to argue; she would not argue. She was dead against the entire project. He had not said to her that it was no affair of hers, but she knew that such was his thought, and she resented the attitude. No affair of hers? When it threatened her felicity? No! She would not have it. She was happy and secure. And while lying luxuriously back in her lounge she would maintain all the defences of her happiness and her security.

## II

Holding the green book in front of her, Edwin said quietly :  
" Read this ! "

" Which ? "

He pointed with his finger.

She read :

*" I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contained.*

*I stand and look at them long and long.*

*They do not sweat and whine about their condition.*

*They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins.*

*They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God.*

*Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things.*

*Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago.*

*Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth."*

Edwin had lately been exciting himself, not for the first time, over Walt Whitman.

"Fine, isn't it?" he said, sure that she would share his thrill.

"Magnificent!" she agreed, with quiet enthusiasm. "I must read more of that." She gazed over the top of the book through the open blue-curtained window into the garden.

He withdrew the book and closed it.

"You haven't got that tune exactly right, you know," he said, jerking his head in the direction of the music.

"Oh!" She was startled. What did he know about it? He could not play the piano.

"Where are you?" he asked. "Show me. Where's the confounded place on the piano? Well! At the end you play it like this"—he imitated her—"whereas it ought to be like this." He played the last four notes differently.

"So it ought!" she murmured with submission, after having frowned.

"That bit of a tune's been running in my head, too," he said.

The strange beauty of Whitman and the strange beauty of Dvorak seemed to unite, and both Edwin and Hilda were uplifted, not merely by these mingled beauties, but by their realization of the wondrous fact that they both took intense pleasure in the same varied forms of beauty. Happiness rose about them like a sweet smell in the spaces of the comfortable impeccable drawing-room. And for a moment they leaned towards each other in bliss—across the open question. . . . Was it still open? . . . Ah! Edwin might be ingenuous, a simpleton, but Hilda admitted the astounding, mystifying adroitness of his demeanour. Had he abandoned the lithographic project, or was he privately nursing it? In his friendliness towards herself was there a reserve, or was there not? She knew . . . she did not know . . . she knew.

. . . Yes, there was a reserve, but it was so infinitesimal that she could not define it,—could not decide whether it was due to obstinacy of purpose, or merely to a sense of injury, whether it was resentful or condescending. Exciting times! And she perceived that her new life was gradually getting fuller of such excitements.

“ Well,” said he, “ it’s nearly three. Quarter-day’s coming along. I’d better be off down and earn a bit towards Maggie’s rent.”

Before the June quarter-day he had been jocular in the same way about Maggie’s rent. In the division of old Darius Clayhanger’s estate Maggie had taken over the Clayhanger house, and Edwin paid rent to her therefor.

“ I wish you wouldn’t talk like that,” said Hilda, pouting amiably.

“ Why not ? ”

“ Well, I wish you wouldn’t.”

“ Anyhow, the rent has to be paid, I suppose.”

“ And I wish it hadn’t. I wish we didn’t live in Maggie’s house.”

“ Why ? ”

“ I don’t like the idea of it.”

“ You’re sentimental.”

“ You can call it what you like. I don’t like the idea of us living in Maggie’s house. I never feel as if I was at home. No, I don’t feel as if I was at home.”

“ What a kid you are ! ”

“ You won’t change me,” she persisted stoutly.

He knew that she was not sympathetic towards the good Maggie. And he knew the reasons for her attitude, though they had never been mentioned. One was mere vague jealousy of Maggie as her predecessor in the house. The other was that Maggie was always very tepid towards George. George had annoyed her on his visits previous to his mother’s marriage, and moreover Maggie had dimly resented Edwin’s interest in the son of a mysterious woman. If she had encountered George after the proclamation of Edwin’s engagement she would have accepted the child with her customary cheerful blandness. But she had encountered him too soon, and her puzzled gaze had said to George : “ Why is my brother



so taken up with you? There must be an explanation, and your strange mother is the explanation." Edwin did not deny Maggie's attitude to George, but he defended Maggie as a human being. Though dull, 'she was absolutely the right sort,' and the very slave of duty and loyalty. He would have liked to make Hilda see all Maggie's excellences.

"Do you know what I've been thinking?" Hilda went on. "Suppose you were to buy the house from Maggie? Then it would be ours."

He answered with a smile:

"What price 'the mania for owning things'? . . . Would you like me to?" There was promise in his roguish voice.

"Oh! I should. I've often thought of it," she said eagerly. And at the same time all her gestures and glances seemed to be saying: "Humour me! I appeal to you as a girl pouting and capricious. But humour me. You know it gives you pleasure to humour me. You know you like me not to be too reasonable. We both know it. I *want* you to do this."

It was not the fact that she had often thought of the plan. But in her eagerness she imagined it to be the fact. She had never seriously thought of the plan until that moment, and it appeared doubly favourable to her now, because the execution of it, by absorbing capital, ought to divert Edwin from his lithographic project, and perhaps render the lithographic project impossible for years.

She added, aloud:

"Then you wouldn't have any rent to pay."

"How true!" said Edwin, rallying her. "But it would stand me in a loss, because I should have to pay too much for the place."

"Why?" she cried, in arms. "Why should Maggie ask too much just because you want it? And think of all the money you've spent on it!"

"The money spent on it only increases its value to Maggie. You don't seem to understand landlordism, my child. But that's not the point at all. Maggie won't *ask* any price. Only I couldn't decently pay her less than the value she took the house over at when we divided up. To wit, £1,800. It ain't worth that. I only pay £60 rent."

"If she took it over at too high a value that's her look out," said the harsh and unjust Hilda.

"Not at all. She was a fool. Albert and Clara persuaded her. It was a jolly good thing for them. I couldn't very well interfere."

"It seems a great shame you should have to pay for what Albert and Clara did."

"I needn't unless I want to. Only, if I buy the house, £1,800 will have to be the price."

"Well," said Hilda, "I wish you'd buy it."

"Would she feel more at home if he did?" he seductively chaffed her.

"Yes, she would." Hilda straightened her shoulders and smiled with bravado.

"And suppose Mag won't sell?"

"Will you allow me to mention it to her?" Hilda's submissive tone implied that Edwin was a tyrant who ruled with a nod.

"I don't mind," he said negligently.

"Well, one of these days I just will."

Edwin departed, leaving the book behind. Hilda was flushed. She thought: "It is marvellous. I can do what I like with him. When I use a particular tone, and look at him in a particular way, I can do what I like with him."

She was ecstatically conscious of an incomprehensible power. What a rôle, that of the capricious, pouting queen, reclining luxuriously on her lounge, and subduing a tyrant to a slave! It surpassed that of the world-renowned pianist! . . .

### III

But soon she became more serious. She had a delicious glow of seriousness. She overflowed with gratitude to Edwin. His good-nature was exquisite. He was not perfect. She could see all his faults just as plainly as when she was angry with him. But he was perfect in loveliness. She adored every aspect of him, every manifestation of his character. She felt her responsibility to him and to George. It was hers to bring grace into their lives. Without her, how miserable, how uncared-for, those two would be! They would be like

lost children. Nobody could do for them what she did. Money could not buy what she gave naturally, and mere invention could not devise it. She looked up to Edwin, but at the same time she was mysteriously above both him and George. She had a strange soft wisdom for them. It was agreeable, and it was proper, and it was even prudent, to be capricious on occasion and to win by pouting and wiles and seductions ; but beneath all that lay the tremendous sternness of the wife's duty, everlasting and intricate—a heavy obligation that demanded all her noblest powers for its fulfilment. She rose heroically to the thought of duty, conceiving it as she had never conceived it before. She desired intensely to be the most wonderful wife in the whole history of marriage. And she believed strongly in her capabilities.

She went upstairs to put on another and a finer dress ; for since the disastrous sequel to the At Home she had somewhat wearied in the pursuit of elegance. She had thought : “ What is the use of me putting myself to such a lot of trouble for a husband who is insensible enough to risk my welfare unnecessarily ? ” She was now ashamed of this backsliding. Ada was in the bedroom finicking with something on the dressing-table. Ada sprang to help as soon as she knew that her mistress had to go out ; and she openly admired the new afternoon-dress, and seemed as pleased as though she was to wear it herself. And Ada buttoned her boots and found her gloves and her parasol, and remembered her purse and her bag and her handkerchief.

“ I don't quite know what time I shall be back, Ada.”

“ No'm,” said Ada eagerly, as though saying : “ Of course you don't, m'm. You have many engagements. But no matter when you come back we shall be delighted to see you because the house is nothing without you.”

“ Of course I shall be back for tea.”

“ Oh, yes'm ! ” Ada agreed, as though saying : “ Need you tell me that, m'm ? I know you would never leave the master to have his tea alone.”

Hilda walked regally down the stairs and glanced round about her at the house which belonged to Maggie, and which Edwin had practically promised to buy. Yes, it was a fine house, a truly splendid abode, and it seemed all the finer

because it was Maggie's. Hilda had this regrettable human trait of overvaluing what was not hers and depreciating what was. It accounted in part, possibly, for her often very critical attitude towards Edwin. She passed out of the front-door in triumph, her head full of wise schemes and plots. But even then she was not sure whether she had destroyed—or could ever destroy, by no matter what arts!—the huge, dangerous, lithographic project.

As soon as she was gone, Ada ran yelling to the kitchen :

“Hooray! *She's* safe.”

And both servants burst like infants into the garden, to disport themselves upon the swing.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE FAMILY AT HOME

#### I

**W**HEN Hilda knocked at the door of Auntie Hamps's house in King Street, a marvellously dirty and untidy servant answered the summons, and a smell of greengage jam in the making surged out through the doorway into the street. The servant wore an apron of rough sacking.

"Is Miss Clayhanger in?" coldly asked Hilda, offended by the sight and the smell.

The servant looked suspicious and mysterious.

"No, mum. Her's gone out."

"Mrs. Hamps, then?"

"Missis is up yon," said the servant, jerking her tousled head back towards the stairs.

"Will you tell her I'm here?"

The servant left the visitor on the doorstep, and with an elephantine movement of the knees ran upstairs.

Hilda walked into the passage towards the kitchen. On the kitchen fire was the brilliant copper pan sacred to 'preserving.' Rows of earthenware and glass jats stood irregularly on the table.

"Her'll be down," said the brusque servant, returning, and glared open-mouthed.

"Shall I wait in the sitting-room?"

The house, about seventy years old, was respectably situated in the better part of King Street, at the bottom of the slope near St. Luke's Church. It had once been occupied by a dentist of a certain grandeur, and possessed a garden, of which, however, Auntie Hamps had made a wilderness. The old lady was magnificent, but her magnificence was limited to herself. She could be sublimely generous, gor-



geously hospitable, but only upon special occasions. Her teas, at which a fresh and costly pineapple and wonderful confectionery and pickled salmon and silver plate never lacked, were renowned, but the general level of her existence was very mean. Her servants, of whom she had many, though never more than one at a time, were not only obliged to be Wesleyan Methodists and to attend the Sunday night service, and in the week to go to class-meeting for the purpose of confessing sins and proving the power of Christ,—they were obliged also to eat dripping instead of butter. The mistress sometimes ate dripping, if butter ran short or went up in price. She considered herself a tremendous housewife. She was a martyr to her housewifely ideals. Her private career was chiefly an endless struggle to keep the house clean—to get forward with the work. The house was always going to be clean and never was, despite eternal soap, furniture polish, scrubbing, rubbing. Auntie Hamps never changed her frowzy house-dress for rich visiting attire without the sad thought that she was “leaving something undone.” The servant never went to bed without hearing the discontented phrase: “Well, we must do it to-morrow.” Spring-cleaning in that house lasted for six weeks. On days of hospitality the effort to get the servant ‘dressed’ for tea-time was simply desperate, and not always successful.

Auntie Hamps had no sense of comfort and no sense of beauty. She was incapable of leaning back in a chair, and she regarded linoleum as one of the most satisfactory inventions of the modern age. She ‘saved’ her carpets by means of patches of linoleum, often stringy at the edges, and in some rooms there was more linoleum than anything else. In the way of renewals she bought nothing but linoleum,—unless some chapel bazaar forced her to purchase a satin cushion or a hand-painted grate-screen. All her furniture was old, decrepit, and ugly; it belonged to the worst Victorian period, when every trace of the eighteenth century had disappeared. The abode was always oppressive. It was oppressive even amid hospitality, for then the mere profusion on the tables accused the rest of the interior, creating a feeling of discomfort; and moreover Mrs. Hamps could not be hospitable naturally. She could be nothing and do nothing

naturally. She could no more take off her hypocrisy than she could take off her skin. Her hospitality was altogether too ruthless. And to satisfy that ruthlessness, the guests had always to eat too much. She was so determined to demonstrate her hospitality to herself, that she would never leave a guest alone until he had reached the bursting-point.

Hilda sat grimly in the threadbare sitting-room amid morocco-bound photograph albums, oleographs, and beady knick-knacks, and sniffed the strong odour of jam; and in the violence of her revolt against that widespread messy idolatrous eternal domesticity of which Auntie Hamps was a classic example, she protested that she would sooner buy the worst jam than make the best, and that she would never look under a table for dust, and that naught should induce her to do any housework after midday, and that she would abolish spring-cleaning utterly.

The vast mediocre respectability of the district weighed on her heart. She had been a mistress-drudge in Brighton during a long portion of her adult life; she knew the very depths of domesticity; but at Brighton the eye could find large, rich, luxurious, and sometimes beautiful things for its distraction; and there was the sea. In the Five Towns there was nothing. You might walk from one end of the Five Towns to the other, and not see one object that gave a thrill—unless it was a pair of lovers. And when you went inside the houses you were no better off,—you were even worse off, because you came at once into contact with an ignoble race of slatternly imprisoned serfs driven by narrow-minded women who themselves were serfs with the mentality of serfs and the prodigious conceit of virtue. . . . Talk to Auntie Hamps at home of lawn-tennis or a musical evening, and she would set you down as flighty, and shift the conversation on to soaps or chapels. And there were hundreds of houses in the Five Towns into which no ideas save the ideas of Auntie Hamps had ever penetrated, and tens and hundreds of thousands of such houses all over the industrial districts of Staffordshire, Cheshire, Lancashire, and Yorkshire,—houses where to keep bits of wood clean and to fulfil the ceremonies of pietism, and to help the poor to help themselves,

was the highest good, the sole good. Hilda in her mind saw every house, and shuddered. She turned for relief to the thought of her own house, and in a constructive spirit of rebellion she shaped instantaneously a conscious policy for it. . . . Yes, she took oath that her house should at any rate be intelligent and agreeable before it was clean. She pictured Auntie Hamps gazing at a layer of dust in the Clayhanger hall, and heard herself saying: "Oh, yes, Auntie, it's dust right enough. I keep it there on purpose, to remind me of something I want to remember." She looked round Auntie Hamps's sitting-room and revelled grimly in the monstrous catalogue of its mean ugliness.

And then Auntie Hamps came in, splendidly and yet soberly attired in black to face the world, with her upright, vigorous figure, her sparkling eye, and her admirable complexion; self-content, smiling hospitably; quite unconscious that she was dead, and that her era was dead, and that Hilda was not guiltless of the murder.

"This is nice of you, Hilda. It's quite an honour." And then, archly: "I'm making jam."

"So I see," said Hilda, meaning that so she smelt. "I just looked in on the chance of seeing Maggie."

"Maggie went out about half an hour ago."

Auntie Hamps's expression had grown mysterious. Hilda thought: "What's she hiding from me?"

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter," said she. "You're going out too, Auntie."

"I do wish I'd known you were coming, dear. Will you stay and have a cup of tea?"

"No, no! I won't keep you."

"But it will be a *pleasure*, dear," Auntie Hamps protested warmly.

"No, no! Thanks! I'll just walk along with you a little of the way. Which direction are you going?"

Auntie Hamps hesitated, she was in a dilemma.

"What *is* she hiding from me?" thought Hilda.

"The truth is," said Auntie Hamps, "I'm just popping over to Clara's."

"Well, I'll go with you, Auntie."

"Oh, do!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamps almost passionately.

"Do! I'm sure Clara will be delighted!" She added in a casual tone: "Maggie's there."

Thought Hilda:

"She evidently doesn't want me to go."

After Mrs. Hamps had peered into the grand copper pan and most particularly instructed the servant, they set off.

"I shan't be easy in my mind until I get back," said Auntie Hamps. "Unless you look after them all the time they always forget to stir it."

## II

When they turned in at the gate of the Benbows' house the front-door was already open, and Clara, holding Rupert—her youngest—by the hand, stood smiling to receive them. Obviously they had been descried up the street from one of the bow-windows. This small fact, strengthening in Hilda's mind the gradually formed notion that the Benbows were always lying in wait and that their existence was a vast machination for getting the better of other people, enlivened her prejudice against her sister-in-law. Moreover Clara was in one of her best dresses, and her glance had a peculiar self-conscious expression, partly guilty and partly cunning. Nevertheless, the fair fragility of Clara's face, with its wonderful skin, and her manner, at once girlish and maternal, of holding fast the child's hand, reacted considerably against Hilda's prejudice.

Rupert was freshly all in white, stitched and embroidered with millions of plain and fancy stitches; he had had time neither to tear nor to stain; only on his bib there was a spot of jam. His obese right arm was stretched straight upwards to attain the immense height of the hand of the protective giantess his mother, and this reaching threw the whole balance of his little body over towards the left, and gave him a comical and wistful appearance. He was a pretty and yet sturdy child, with a look indicating a nice disposition, and he had recently been acquiring the marvellous gift of speech. . . . Astounding how the infantile brain added word to word and phrase to phrase, and (as though there were not enough) actually invented delicious words and graphic droll phrases! Nobody could be surprised that he became at once

the centre of greetings. His grand-aunt snatched him up, and without the slightest repugnance he allowed the ancient woman to bury her nose in his face and neck.

And then Hilda embraced him with not less pleasure, for the contact of his delicate flesh, and his flushed timid smile, were exquisite. She wished for a moment that George was only two and a half again, and that she could bathe him, and wipe him, and nurse him close. Clara's pride, though the visitors almost forgot to shake hands with her, was ecstatic. At length Rupert was safely on the step once more. He had made no remark whatever. Shyness prevented him from showing off his new marvellous gift, but his mother, gazing at him, said that in ordinary life he never stopped chattering.

"Come this way, will you?" said Clara effusively, and yet conspiratorially, pointing to the drawing-room, which was to the left of the front-door. From the dining-room, which was to the right of the front-door, issued confused sounds. "Albert's here. I'm so glad you've come," she added to Hilda.

Auntie Hamps murmured warningly into Hilda's ear:

"It's Bert's birthday party."

A fortnight earlier Hilda had heard rumours of Bert's approaching birthday—his twelfth, and therefore a high solemnity—but she had very wrongly forgotten about it.

"I'm so glad you've come," Clara repeated in the drawing-room. "I was afraid you might be hurt. I thought I'd just bring you in here first and explain it all to you."

"Oh! Bless me!" exclaimed Auntie Hamps,—interrupting, as she glanced round the drawing-room. "We are grand! Well I never! We are grand!"

"Do you like it?" said Clara, blushing.

Auntie Hamps in reply told one of the major lies of her career. She said with rapture that she did like the new drawing-room suite. This suite was a proof, disagreeable to Auntie Hamps, that the world would never stand still. It quite ignored all the old Victorian ideals of furniture; and in ignoring the past, it also ignored the future. Victorian furniture had always sought after immortality; in Bursley there were thousands of Victorian chairs and tables that defied time and that nothing but an axe or a conflagration



could destroy. But this new suite thought not of the morrow ; it did not even pretend to think of the morrow. Nobody believed that it would last, and the owners of it simply forbore to reflect upon what it would be after a few years of family use. They contemplated with joy its first state of dainty freshness, and were content therein. Whereas the old Victorians lived in the future (in so far as they truly lived at all), the neo-Victorians lived careless in the present.

The suite was of apparent rosewood, with salmon-tinted upholstery ending in pleats and bows. But white also entered considerably into the scheme, for enamel paint had just reached Bursley and was destined to become the rage. Among the items of the suite was a three-legged milking-stool in deal covered with white enamel paint heightened by salmon-tinted bows of imitation silk. Society had recently been thunder-struck by the originality of putting a milking-stool in a drawing-room ; its quaintness appealed with tremendous force to nearly all hearts ; nearly every housemistress on seeing a milking-stool in a friend's drawing-room, decided that she must have a milking-stool in her drawing-room, and took measures to get one. Clara was among the earlier possessors, the pioneers. Ten years—five years—before, Clara had appropriated the word 'æsthetic' as a term of sneering abuse, with but a vague idea of its meaning ; and now—such is the miraculous effect of time—she was caught up in the movement as it had ultimately spread to the Five Towns, a willing convert and captive, and nothing could exceed her scorn for that which once she had admired to the exclusion of all else. Into that mid-Victorian respectable house, situate in a rather old-fashioned street leading from Shawport Lane to the Canal, and whose boast (even when inhabited by Nonconformists) was that it overlooked the Rectory garden, the new ideals of brightness, freshness, eccentricity, brittleness, and impermanency had entered, and Auntie Hamps herself was intimidated by them.

Hilda gave polite but perfunctory praise. Left alone, she might not have been averse from the new ideals in their more expensive forms, but the influence of Edwin had taught her to despise them. Edwin's tastes in furniture, imbibed from the Orgreaves, neglected the modern, and went even

further back than earliest Victorian. Much of the ugliness bought by his father remained in the Clayhanger house, but all Edwin's own purchases were either antique, or, if new, careful imitations of the pre-Victorian. Had England been peopled by Edwins, all original artists in furniture might have died of hunger. Yet he encouraged original literature. What, however, put Hilda against Clara's drawing-room suite, was not its style, nor its enamel, nor its frills, nor the obviously inferior quality of its varnish, but the mere fact that it had been exposed for sale in Nixon's shop-window in Duck Bank, with the price marked. Hilda did not like this. Now Edwin might see an old weather-glass in some frowzy second-hand shop at Hanbridge or Turnhill, and from indecision might leave it in the second-hand shop for months, and then buy it and hang it up at home,—and instantly it was somehow transferred into another weather-glass, a superior and personal weather-glass. But Clara's suite was not—for Hilda—thus transformed. Indeed, as she sat there in Clara's drawing-room, she had the illusion of sitting in 'Nixon's shop.

Further, Nixon had now got in his window another suite precisely like Clara's. It was astonishing to Hilda that Clara was not ashamed of the publicity and the wholesale reproduction of her suite. But she was not. On the contrary she seemed to draw a mysterious satisfaction from the very fact that suites precisely similar to hers were to be found or would soon be found in unnumbered other drawing-rooms. Nor did she mind that the price was notorious. And in the matter of the price the phrase 'hire-purchase' flitted about in Hilda's brain. She felt sure that Albert Benbow had not paid cash to Nixon. She regarded the hire-purchase system as unrespectable, if not immoral, and this opinion was one of the very few she shared with Auntie Hamps. Both ladies in their hearts, and in the security of their financial positions, blamed the Benbows for imprudence. Nobody, not even his wife, knew just how Albert 'stood,' but many took leave to guess—and guessed unfavourably.

"Do sit down," said Clara, too urgently. She was so preoccupied that Hilda's indifference to her new furniture did not affect her.

They all sat down, primly, in the pretty primness of the drawing-room, and Rupert leaned as if tired against his mother's fine skirt.

Hilda, expectant, glanced vaguely about her. Auntie Hamps did the same. On the central table lay a dictionary of the English language, open and leaves downwards; and near it a piece of paper containing a long list of missing words in pencil. Auntie Hamps, as soon as her gaze fell on these objects, looked quickly away, as though she had by accident met the obscene. Clara caught the movement, flushed somewhat, and recovered herself.

"I'm so glad you've come," she repeated yet again to Hilda, with a sickly-sweet smile. "I did so want to explain to you how it was we didn't ask George—I was afraid you might be vexed."

"What an idea!" Hilda murmured as naturally as she could, her nostrils twitching uneasily in the atmosphere of small feuds and misunderstandings which Clara breathed with such pleasure. She laughed, to reassure Clara, and also in enjoyment of the thought that for days Clara had pictured her as wondering sensitively why no invitation to the party had come for George, while in fact the party had never crossed her mind. She regretted that she had no gift for Bert, but decided to give him half-a-crown for his savings-bank account, of which she had heard a lot.

"To tell ye the truth," said Clara, launching herself, "we've had a lot of trouble with Bert. Albert's been quite put about. It was only the day before yesterday Albert got out of him the truth about the night of your At Home, Hilda, when he ran away after he'd gone to bed. Albert said to him: 'I shan't whip you, and I shan't put you on bread and water. Only if you don't tell me what you were doing that night there'll be no birthday and no birthday party—that's all.' So at last Bert gave in. And d'you know what he *was* doing? Holding a prayer-meeting with your George and that boy of Clowes's next door to your house down Hulton Street. Did you know?"

Hilda shook her head bravely. Officially she did not know.

"Did you ever hear of such a thing?" exclaimed Auntie Hamps.

"Yes," proceeded Clara, taking breath for a new start. "And Bert's story is that they prayed for a penknife for your George, and it came. And then they prayed for a bicycle for our Bert, but the bicycle didn't come, and then Bert and George had a fearful quarrel, and George gave him the penknife—made him have it—and then said he'd never speak to him any more as long as he lived. At first Albert was inclined to thrash Bert for telling lies and being irreverent, but in the end he came to the conclusion that at any rate Bert was telling what he thought to be the truth. . . . And that Clowes boy is so *little*! . . . Bert wanted his birthday party, of course, but he begged and prayed us not to ask George. So in the end we decided we'd better not, and we let him have his own way. That's all there is to it. . . . So George has said nothing?"

"Not a word," replied Hilda.

"And the Clowes boy is so *little*!" said Clara again. She went suddenly to the mantelpiece and picked up a penknife and offered it to Hilda.

"Here's the penknife. Of course Albert took it off him."

"Why?" said Hilda ingenuously.

But Clara detected satire and repelled it with a glance.

"It's not Edwin's penknife, I suppose?" she queried, in a severe tone.

"No, it isn't. I've never seen it before. Why?"

"We were only thinking Edwin might have overheard the boys and thrown a knife over the wall. It would be just like Edwin, that would."

"Oh, no!" The deceitful Hilda blew away such a possibility.

"I'm quite sure he didn't," said she, and added mischievously as she held out the penknife: "I thought all you folks believed in the efficacy of prayer?"

These simple words were never forgiven by Clara.

The next moment, having restored the magic penknife to the mantelpiece, and gathered up her infant, she was leading the way to the dining-room.

"Come along, Rupy, my darling," said she.

"Rupy!" Hilda privately imitated her, deriding the absurdity of the diminutive.

"If you ask me," said Auntie Hamps, determined to save the honour of the family, "it's that little Clowes monkey that is responsible. I've been thinking it over since you told me about it last night, Clara, and I feel almost sure it must have been that little Clowes monkey."

She was magnificent. She was no longer a housekeeper worried about the processes of jam-making, but a grandiose figure out in the world, a figure symbolic, upon whom had developed the duty of keeping up appearances on behalf of all mankind.

## III

The dining-room had not yet begun to move with the times. It was rather a shabby apartment, accustomed to daily ill-treatment, and its contents dated from different periods, the most ancient object of all stretching backwards in family history to the epoch of Albert's great-grandfather. This was an oak arm-chair, occupied usually by Albert, but on the present occasion by his son and heir, Bert. Bert, spectacled, was at the head of the table; and at the foot was his Auntie Maggie in front of a tea-tray. Down the sides of the table were his sisters, thin Clara, fat Amy, and little Lucy—the first nearly as old as Bert—and his father; two crumb-strewn plates showed that the mother and Rupert had left the meal to greet the visitors. And there were two other empty places. In a tiny vase in front of Amy was a solitary flower. The room was nearly full; it had an odour of cake, tea, and children.

"Well, here we are," said Clara, entering with the guests and Rupert, very cheerfully. "Getting on all right?" (She gave Albert a glance which said: "I have explained everything, but Hilda is a very peculiar creature.")

"Ay," Albert answered. "Hello, all you aunties!"

"Albert left the works early on purpose," Clara explained her husband's presence.

He was a happy man. In early adolescence he had taken to Sunday Schools as some youths take to vice. He loved to exert authority over children, and experience had taught him all the principal dodges. Under the forms of benevolent autocracy, he could exercise a ruthless discipline upon young-



sters. He was not at all ashamed at being left in charge of a tableful of children while his wife went forth to conduct diplomatic interviews. At the same time he had his pride. Thus he would express no surprise, nor even pleasure, at the presence of Hilda, his theory being that it ought to be taken as a matter of course. Indeed he was preoccupied by the management of the meal, and he did not conceal the fact. He shook hands with the ladies in a perfunctory style, which seemed to say: "Now the supreme matter is this birthday repast. I am running it, and I am running it very well. Slip unobtrusively into your places in the machine, and let me continue my work of direction."

Nevertheless, he saw to it that all the children rose politely and saluted according to approved precedents. His eye was upon them. He attached importance to every little act in any series of little acts. If he cut the cake, he had the air of announcing to the world: "This is a beautiful cake. I have carefully estimated the merits of this cake, and mother has carefully estimated them; we have in fact all come to a definite and favourable conclusion about this cake,—namely that it is a beautiful cake. I will now cut it. The operation of cutting it is a major operation. Watch me cut it, and then watch me distribute it. Wisdom and justice shall preside over the distribution." Even if he only passed the salt, he passed it as though he were passing extreme unction.

Auntie Hamps with apparent delight adapted herself to his humour. She said she would "squeeze in" anywhere, and was soon engaged in finding perfection in everything that appertained to the Benbow family. Hilda, not being quite so intimate with the household, was installed with more ceremony. She could not keep out of her eye the idea that it was droll to see a stoutish, somewhat clay-dusted man neglecting his business in order to take charge of a birthday party of small children; and Albert, observing this, could not keep out of his eye the rebutting assertion that it was not in the least droll, but entirely proper and laudable.

The first mention of birthday presents came from Auntie Hamps, who remarked with enthusiasm that Bert looked a regular little man in his beautiful new spectacles. Bert, glowering, gloomy and yet proud, and above all self-conscious,

grew even more self-conscious at this statement. Spectacles had been ordained for him by the oculist, and his parents had had the hardihood to offer him his first pair for a birthday present. They had so insisted on the beauty and originality of the scheme that Bert himself had almost come to believe that to get a pair of spectacles for a birthday present was a great thing in a boy's life. He was now wearing the spectacles for the first time. On the whole, gloom outbalanced pride in his demeanour, and Bert's mysterious soul, which had flabbergasted his father for about a week, peeped out sidelong occasionally through those spectacles in bitter criticism of the institution of parents. He ate industriously. Soon Auntie Hamps, leaning over, rapped half-a-sovereign down on his sticky plate. Everybody pretended to be overwhelmed, though nobody entitled to prophesy had expected less. Almost simultaneously with the ring of the gold on the plate, Clara said :

"Now what do you say?"

But Albert was judiciously benevolent :

"Leave him alone, mother—he'll say it all right."

"I'm sure he will," his mother agreed.

And Bert said it, blushing, and fingering the coin nervously. And Auntie Hamps sat like an antique goddess, bland, superb, morally immense. And even her dirty and broken fingernails detracted naught from her grandiosity. She might feed servants on dripping, but when the proper moment came she could fling half-sovereigns about with anybody.

And then, opening her purse, Hilda added five shillings to the half-sovereign, amid admiring exclamations sincere and insincere. Beside Auntie Hamps's gold the two half-crowns cut a poor figure, and therefore Hilda, almost without discontinuing the gesture of largess, said :

"That is from Uncle Edwin. And this," putting a florin and three shillings more to the treasure, "is from Auntie Hilda."

Somehow she was talking as the others talked, and she disliked herself for yielding to the spirit of the Benbow home, but she could not help it ; the pervading spirit conquered everybody. She felt self-conscious ; and Bert's self-consciousness was still further increased as the exclamations grew in

power and sincerity. Though he experienced the mournful pride of rich possessions, he knew well that the money would be of no real value. His presents, all useful (save a bouquet of flowers from Rupert), were all useless to him. Thus the prim young Clara had been parentally guided to give him a comb. If all the combs in the world had been suddenly annihilated Bert would not have cared,—would indeed have rejoiced. And as to the spectacles, he would have preferred the prospect of total blindness in middle age to the compulsion of wearing them. Who can wonder that his father had not fathomed the mind of the strange creature?

Albert gazed rapt at the beautiful sight of the plate. It reminded him pleasantly of a collection-plate at the Sunday-School Anniversary sermons. In a moment the conversation ran upon savings-bank accounts. Each child had a savings-bank account, and their riches were astounding. Rupert had an account and was getting interest at the rate of two and a half per cent. on six pounds ten shillings. The thriftiness of the elder children had reached amounts which might be mentioned with satisfaction even to the luxurious wife of the richest member of the family. Young Clara was the wealthiest of the band. "I've got the most, haven't I, fardy?" she said with complacency. "I've got more than Bert, haven't I?" Nobody seemed to know how it was that she had surpassed Bert, who had had more birthdays and more Christmases. The inferiority of the eldest could not be attributed to dissipation or improvidence, for none of the children was allowed to spend a cent. The savings-bank devoured all, and never rendered back. However, Bert was now creeping up, and his mother exhorted him to do his best in future. She then took the money from the plate, and promised Bert for the morrow the treat of accompanying her to the Post Office in order to bury it.

A bell rang within the house, and at once young Clara exclaimed:

"Oh! there's Flossie! Oh, my word, she *is* late, isn't she, fardy? What a good thing we didn't wait tea for her! . . . Move up, miss." This to Lucy.

"People who are late must take the consequences, especially little girls," said Albert in reply.

And presently Flossie entered, tripping, shrugging up her shoulders and throwing back her mane, and wonderfully innocent.

"This is Flossie, who is always late," Albert introduced her to Hilda.

"Am I really?" said Flossie, in a very low, soft voice, with a bright and apparently frightened smile.

Dark Flossie was of Amy's age and supposed to be Amy's particular friend. She was the daughter of young Clara's music-mistress. The little girl's prestige in the Benbow house was due to two causes. First, she was graceful and rather stylish in movement—qualities which none of the Benbow children had, though young Clara was pretty enough; and second, her mother had rather more pupils than she could comfortably handle, and indeed sometimes refused a pupil.

Flossie with her physical elegance was like a foreigner among the Benbows. She had a precocious demeanour. She shook hands and embraced like a woman, and she gave her birthday gift to Bert as if she were distributing a prize. It was a lead-pencil, with a patent sharpener. Bert would have preferred a bicycle, but the patent sharpener made an oasis in his day. His father pointed out to him that as the pencil was already sharpened he could not at present use the sharpener. Amy thereupon furtively passed him the stump of a pencil to operate upon, and then his mother told him that he had better postpone his first sharpening until he got into the garden, where bits of wood would not be untidy. Flossie carefully settled her very short white skirts on a chair, smiling all the time, and inquired about two brothers who she had been told were to be among the guests. Albert informed her with solemnity that these two brothers were both down with measles, and that Auntie Hamps and Auntie Hilda had come to make up for their absence.

"Poor things!" murmured Flossie sympathetically.

Hilda laughed, and Flossie, screwing up her eyes and shrugging up her shoulders, laughed too, as if saying: "You and I alone understand me."

"What a pretty flower!" Flossie exclaimed, in her low, soft voice, indicating the flower in the vase in front of Amy.

"There's half a crumb left," said Albert, passing the cake

plate to Flossie carefully. "We thought we'd better keep it for you, though we don't reckon to keep anything for little girls that come late."

"Amy," whispered her mother, leaning towards the fat girl. "Wouldn't it be nice of you to give your flower to Flossie?"

Amy started.

"I don't want to," she whispered back, flushing.

The flower was a gift to Amy from Bert, out of the birthday bunch presented to him by Rupert. Mysterious relations existed between Bert and the benignant acquiescent Amy.

"Oh! Amy!" her mother protested, still whispering, but shocked.

Tears came into Amy's eyes. These tears Amy at length wiped away, and, straightening her face, offered the flower with stiff, outstretched arm to her friend Flossie. And Flossie smilingly accepted it.

"It is kind of you, you darling!" said Flossie, and stuck the flower in an interstice of her embroidered pinafore.

Amy, gravely lacking in self-control, began to whimper again.

"*That's my good little girl!*" muttered Clara to her, exhibiting pride in her daughter's victory over self, and rubbed the child's eyes with her handkerchief. The parents were continually thus "bringing up" their children. Hilda pressed her lips together.

Immediately afterwards it was noticed that Flossie was no longer eating.

"I've had quite enough, thank you," said she, in answer to expostulations.

"No jam, even? And you've not finished your tea!"

"I've had quite enough, thank you," said she, and folded up her napkin.

"Please, father, can we go and play in the garden now?" Bert asked.

Albert looked at his wife.

"Yes, I think they might," said Clara. "Go and play nicely." They all rose.

"Now quietly, quietly!" Albert warned them.

And they went from the room quietly, each in his own



fashion,—Flossie like a modest tsarina, young Clara full of virtue and holding Rupert by the hand, Amy lumpily, tiny Lucy as one who had too soon been robbed of the privilege of being the youngest, and Bert in the rear like a criminal who is observed in a suspicious act. And Albert blew out wind, as if getting rid of a great weight.

## IV

“Finished your greengage, Auntie?” asked Clara, after the pause which ensued while the adults were accustoming themselves to the absence of the children.

And it was Maggie who answered, rather eagerly:

“No, she hasn’t. She left it to the tender mercies of that Maria. She wouldn’t let me stay, and she wouldn’t stay herself.”

These were almost the first words, save murmurings as to cups of tea, quantities of sugar and of milk, etc., that the taciturn Maggie had uttered since Hilda’s arrival. She was not sulky, she had merely been devoting herself and allowing herself to be exploited, in the vacuous manner customary to her, and listening receptively—or perhaps not even receptively—offering no remark. Save that the smooth-working mechanism of the repast would have creaked and stopped at her departure, she might have slipped from the room unnoticed as a cat. But now she spoke as one capable of enthusiasm and resentment on behalf of an ideal. To her it was scandalous that greengage jam should be jeopardized for the sake of social pleasures, and suddenly it became evident she and her auntie had had a difference on the matter.

Mrs. Hamps said stoutly and defiantly, with grandeur:

“Well, I wasn’t going to have my eldest grand-nephew’s twelfth birthday-party interfered with for any jam.”

“Hear, hear!” said Hilda, liking the terrific woman for an instant.

But mild Maggie was inflexible.

Clara, knowing that in Maggie very slight symptoms had enormous significance, at once changed the subject. Albert went to the back window, whence, by twisting his neck, he could descry a corner of the garden.

Said Clara, smiling:

"I hear you're going to have some *musical evenings*, Hilda . . . on Sunday nights."

Malice and ridicule were in Clara's tone. On the phrase 'musical evenings' she put a strange disdainful emphasis, as though a musical evening denoted something not only unrighteous but snobbish, new-fangled, and absurd. Yet envy also was in her tone.

Hilda was startled.

"Ah! Who told you that?"

"Never mind! I heard," said Clara darkly.

Hilda wondered where the Benbows, from whom seemingly naught could be concealed, had in fact got this titbit of news. By tacit consent she and Edwin had as yet said nothing to anybody except the Orgreaves, who alone, with Tertius Ingpen and one or two more intimates, were invited, or were to be invited, to the first evening. Relations between the Orgreaves and the Benbows scarcely existed.

"We're having a little music on Sunday night," said Hilda, as it were apologetically, and scorning herself for being apologetic. Why should she be apologetic to these base creatures? But she couldn't help it; the public opinion of the room was too much for her. She even added: "We're hoping that old Mrs. Orgreave will come. It will be the first time she's been out in the evening for ever so long." The name of Mrs. Orgreave was calculated by Hilda to overawe them and stop their mouths.

No name, however, could overawe Mrs. Hamps. She smiled kindly, and with respect for the caprices of others; she spoke in a tone exceptionally polite,—but what she said was:

"I'm sorry . . . I'm sorry."

The deliverance was final. Auntie Hamps was almost as deeply moved about the approaching desecration of the Sabbath as Maggie had been about the casual treatment of jam. In earlier years she would have said a great deal more—just as in earlier years she would have punctuated Bert's birthday mouthfuls with descants upon the excellence of his parents and moral exhortations to himself; but Auntie Hamps was growing older, and quieter, and "I'm sorry . . . I'm sorry" meant much from her.

Hilda became sad, disgusted, indignant, moody. The

breach which separated her and Edwin from the rest of the family was enormous, as might be seen in the mere fact that they had never for a moment contemplated asking anybody in the family to the musical evening, nor had the family ever dreamed of an invitation. It was astonishing that Edwin should be so different from the others. But after all, was he? She could see in him sometimes bits of Maggie, of Clara, and even of the Unspeakable. She was conscious of her grievances against Edwin. Among these was that he never, or scarcely ever, praised her. At moments, when she had tried hard, she felt a great need of praise. But Edwin would watch her critically, with the damnable grim detachment of the Five Towns towards a stranger or a returned exile.

As she sat in the stuffy dining-room of the Benbows, surrounded by hostilities and incomprehensions, she had a sensation of unreality, or at any rate of a vast mistake. Why was she there? Was she not tied by intimate experience to a man at that very instant in prison? (She had a fearful vision of him in prison,—she, sitting there in the midst of Maggie, Clara, and Auntie Hamps!) Was she not the mother of an illegitimate boy? Victimized or not, innocent or not, she, a guest at Bert's intensely legitimate birthday fête, was the mother of an illegitimate boy. Incredible! She ought never to have married into the Clayhangers, never to have come back to this cackling provincial district. All these people were inimical towards her,—because she represented the luxury and riches and worldly splendour of the family, and because her illegitimate boy had tempted the heir of the Benbows to blasphemous wickedness, and because she herself had tempted a weak Edwin to abandon chapel and to desecrate the Sabbath, and again because she, without a penny of her own, had stepped in and now represented the luxury and riches and worldly splendour of the family. And all the family's grievances against Edwin were also grievances against her. Once, long ago, when he was yet a bachelor, and had no hope of Hilda, Edwin had prevented his father, in dotage, from lending a thousand pounds to Albert upon no security. The interference was unpardonable, and Hilda would not be pardoned for it.

Such was marriage into a family. Such was family life. . . . Yes, she felt unreal there, and also unsafe. She had prevaricated about George and the penknife ; and she had allowed Clara to remain under the impression that her visit to the house was a birthday visit. Auntie Hamps and destiny, between them, would lay bare all this lying. The antipathy against her would increase. But let it increase never so much, it still would not equal Hilda's against the family, as she thrilled to it then. Their narrow ignorance, their narrow self-conceit, their detestation of beauty, their pietism, their bigotry—revolted her. In what century had they been living all those years ? Was this married life ? Had Albert and Clara ever felt a moment of mutual passion ? They were nothing but parents, eternally preoccupied with 'oughts' and 'ought nots,' and forbiddances and horrid reluctant permissions. They did not know what joy was, and they did not want anybody else to know what joy was. Even on the outskirts of such a family, a musical evening on a Sunday night appeared a forlorn enterprise. And all the families in all the streets were the same. Hilda was hard enough on George sometimes, but in that moment she would have preferred George to be a thoroughly bad rude boy and to go to the devil, and herself to be a woman abandoned to every licence, rather than that he and she should resemble Clara and her offspring. All her wrath centred upon Clara as the very symbol of what she loathed .

"Hello !" cried the watchful Albert from the window. "What's happening, I wonder ? "

In a moment Rupert ran into the room, and without a word scrambled on his mother's lap, absolutely confident in her goodness and power.

"What's amiss, tuppenny ? " asked his father.

"Tired," answered Rupert, with a faint, endearing smile.

He laid himself close against his mother's breast, and drew up his knees, and Clara held his body in her arms, and whispered to him.

"Amy 'udn't play with me," he murmured.

"Wouldn't she ? Naughty Amy ! "

"Mammy tired too," he glanced upwards at his mother's eyes in sympathy.

And immediately he was asleep. Clara kissed him, bending her head down and with difficulty reaching his cheek with her lips.

Auntie Hamps inquired fondly :

"What does he mean—'Mother tired too'?"

"Well," said Clara, "the fact is, some of 'em were so excited they stopped my afternoon sleep this afternoon. I always do have my nap, you know,"—she looked at Hilda. "In here! When this door's closed they know mother mustn't be disturbed. Only this afternoon Lucy or Amy—I don't know which, and I didn't inquire too closely—forgot. . . . He's remembered it, the little turk."

"Is he asleep?" Hilda demanded in a low voice.

"Fast. He's been like that lately. He'll play a bit, and then he'll stop and say he's tired, and sometimes cry, and he'll come to me and be asleep in two jiffs. I think he's been a bit run down. He said he had toothache yesterday. It was nothing but a little cold; they've all had colds; but I wrapped his face up to please him. He looked so sweet in his bandage, I assure you I didn't want to take it off again. No, I didn't. . . . I wonder why Amy wouldn't play with him. She's such a splendid playmate—when she likes. Full of imagination! Simply full of it!"

Albert had approached from the window.

With an air of important conviction, he said to Hilda :

"Yes, Amy's imagination is really remarkable." As no one responded to this statement, he drummed on the table to ease the silence, and then suddenly added : "Well, I suppose I must be getting on with my dictionary reading! I'm only at S; and there's bound to be a lot of words under U—beginning with *un*, you know. I saw at once there would be." He spoke rather defiantly, as though challenging public opinion to condemn his new dubious activity.

"Oh!" said Clara. "Albert's quite taken up with missing words nowadays."

But instead of conning his dictionary, Albert returned to the window, drawn by his inexhaustible paternal curiosity, and he even opened the window and leaned out, so that he might more effectively watch the garden. And with the



fresh air there entered the high, gay, inspiriting voices of the children.

Clara smiled down at the boy sleeping in her lap. She was happy. The child was happy. His flushed face, with its expression of loving innocence, was exquisitely touching. Clara's face was full of proud tenderness. Everybody gazed at the picture with secret and profound pleasure. Hilda wished once more that George was only two and a half years old again. George's infancy, and her early motherhood, had been very different from all this. She had never been able to shut a dining-room door, or any other door, as a sign that she must not be disturbed. And certainly George had never sympathetically remarked that she was tired. . . . She was envious. . . . And yet a minute ago she had been execrating the family life of the Benbows. The complexity of the tissue of existence was puzzling.

## v

When Albert brought his head once more into the room he suddenly discovered the stuffiness of the atmosphere, and with the large free gestures of a mountaineer and a sanitarian threw open both windows as wide as possible. The bleak wind from the moorlands surged in, fluttering curtains, and lowering the temperature at a run.

"Won't Rupert catch cold?" Hilda suggested, chilled.

"He's got to be hardened, Rupert has!" Albert replied easily. "Fresh air! Nothing like it! Does 'em good to feel it!"

Hilda thought:

"Pity you didn't think so a bit earlier!"

Her countenance was too expressive. Albert divined some ironic thought in her brain, and turned on her with a sort of parrying jeer:

"And how's the great man getting along?"

In this phrase, which both he and Clara employed with increasing frequency, Albert let out not only his jealousy of, but his respect for, the head of the family. Hilda did not like it, but it flattered her on Edwin's behalf, and she never showed her resentment of the attitude which prompted it.

"Edwin? Oh, he's all right. He's working." She put

a slight emphasis on the last pronoun, in order revengefully to contrast Edwin's industry with Albert's presence during business hours at a children's birthday-party. "He said to me as he went out that he must go and earn something towards Maggie's rent." She laughed softly.

Clara smiled cautiously; Maggie smiled and blushed a little; Albert did not commit himself; only Auntie Hamps laughed without reserve.

"Edwin will have his joke," said she.

Although Hilda had audaciously gone forth that afternoon with the express intention of opening negotiations, on her own initiative, with Maggie for the purchase of the house, she had certainly not meant to discuss the matter in the presence of the entire family. But she was seized by one of her characteristic impulses, and she gave herself up to it with the usual mixture of glee and apprehension. She said:

"I suppose you wouldn't care to sell us the house, would you, Maggie?"

Everybody became alert, and as it grew apparent that the company was assisting at the actual birth of a family episode or incident, a peculiar feeling of eager pleasure spread through the room, and the appetite for history-making leapt up.

"Indeed I should!" Maggie answered, with a deepening flush, and all were astonished at her decisiveness and at the warmth of her tone. "I never wanted the house. Only it was arranged that I should have it, so of course I took it." The long-silent victim was speaking. Money was useless to her, for she was incapable of turning it into happiness; but she had her views on finance and property, nevertheless; and though in all such matters she did as she was told, submissively accepting the decisions of brother or brother-in-law as decrees of fate, yet she was quite aware of the victimhood. The assemblage was surprised and even a little intimidated by her mild outburst.

"But you've got a very good tenant, Maggie," said Auntie Hamps enthusiastically.

"She's got a very good tenant, admitted!" Albert said judicially and almost sternly. "But she'd never have any difficulty in finding a very good tenant for that house. That's

not the point. The point is that the investment really isn't remunerative. Maggie could do much better for herself than that. Very much better. Why, if she went the right way about it, she could get ten per cent. on her money! I know of things. . . . And I bet she doesn't get three and a half per cent. clear from the house. Not three and a half." He glanced reproachfully at Hilda.

"Do you mean the rent's too low?" Hilda questioned boldly.

He hesitated, losing courage.

"I don't say it's too low. But Maggie perhaps took the house over at too big a figure."

Maggie looked up at her brother-in-law.

"And whose fault was that?" she asked sharply. The general surprise was intensified. No one could understand Maggie. No one had the wit to perceive that she had been truly annoyed by Auntie Hamps's negligence in regard to jam, and was momentarily capable of bitterness. "Whose fault was that?" she repeated. "You and Clara and Edwin settled it between you. You yourself said over and over again it was a fair figure."

"I thought so at the time! I thought so at the time!" said Albert quickly. "We all acted for the best."

"I'm sure you did," murmured Auntie Hamps.

"I should think so, indeed!" murmured Clara, seeking to disguise her constraint by attentions to the sleeping Rupert.

"Is Edwin thinking of buying, then?" Albert asked Hilda, in a quiet, studiously careless voice.

"We've discussed it," responded Hilda.

"Because if he is, he ought to take it over at the price Mag took it at. She oughtn't to lose on it. That's only fair."

"I'm sure Edwin would never do anything unfair," said Auntie Hamps.

Hilda made no reply. She had already heard the argument from Edwin, and Albert now seemed to her more tedious and unprincipled than usual. Her reason admitted the force of the argument as regards Maggie, but instinct opposed it.

Nevertheless she was conscious of sudden sympathy for Maggie, and of a weakening of her prejudice against her.

"Hadn't we better be going, Auntie?" Maggie curtly and reproachfully suggested. "You know quite well that jam stands a good chance of being ruined."

"I suppose we had," Auntie Hamps concurred with a sigh, and rose.

"I shall be able to carry out my plan," thought Hilda, full of wisdom and triumph. And she saw Edwin owner of the house, with his wild lithographic project scotched. And the realization of her own sagacity thus exercised on behalf of those she loved, made her glad.

At the same moment, just as Albert was recommencing his flow, the door opened and Edwin entered. He had glimpsed the children in the garden and had come into the house by the back way. There were cries of stupefaction and bliss. Both Albert and Clara were unmistakably startled and flattered. Indeed, several seconds elapsed before Albert could assume the proper grim, casual air. Auntie Hamps rejoiced and sat down again. Maggie disclosed no feeling, and she would not sit down again. Hilda had a serious qualm. She was obliged to persuade herself that in opening the negotiations for the house she had not committed an enormity. She felt less sagacious and less dominant. Who could have dreamt that Edwin would pop in just then? It was notorious, it was even a subject of complaint, that he never popped in. In reply to inquiries he stammered in his customary hesitating way that he happened to be in the neighbourhood on business and that it had occurred to him, etc., etc. In short, there he was.

"Aren't you coming, Auntie?" Maggie demanded.

"Let me have a look at Edwin, child," said Auntie Hamps, somewhat nettled. "How set you are!"

"Then I shall go alone," said Maggie.

"Yes. But what about this house business?" Albert tried to stop her.

He could not stop her. Finance, houses, rents, were not real to her. She owned but did not possess such things. But the endangered jam was real to her. She did not own it, but she possessed it. She departed.

"What's amiss with her to-day?" murmured Mrs. Hamps.

"I must go too, or I shall be catching it; my word I shall!"

"What house business?" Edwin asked.

"Well," said Albert, "I like that! Aren't you trying to buy her house from her? We've just been talking it over."

Edwin glanced swiftly at Hilda, and Hilda knew from the peculiar constrained, almost shamefaced, expression on his features, that he was extremely annoyed. He gave a little nervous laugh.

"Oh! Have ye?" he muttered.

## VI

Although Edwin discussed the purchase of the house quite calmly with Albert, and appeared to regard it as an affair practically settled, Hilda could perceive, from a single gesture of his in the lobby as they were leaving, that his resentment against herself had not been diminished by the smooth course of talking. Nevertheless she was considerably startled by his outburst in the street.

"It's a pity Maggie went off like that," she said quietly. "You might have fixed everything up immediately."

Then it was that he turned on her, glowering angrily:

"Why on earth did you go talking about it without telling me first?" he demanded, furious.

"But it was understood, dear——" She smiled, affecting not to perceive his temper, and thereby aggravating it.

He almost shouted:

"Nothing of the kind! Nothing of the kind!"

"Maggie was there. I just happened to mention it." Hilda was still quite placid.

"You went down on purpose to tell her, so you needn't deny it. Do you take me for a fool?"

Her placidity was undiminished.

"Of course I don't take you for a fool, dear. I assure you I hadn't the slightest idea you'd be annoyed."

"Yes, you had. I could see it on your face when I came in. Don't try to stuff me up. You go blundering into a thing without the least notion—without the least notion! I've told you before, and I tell you again—I won't have you interfering in my business affairs. You know nothing of business. You'll make my life impossible. All you women



are the same. You will poke your noses in. There'll have to be a clear understanding between you and me on one or two points, before we go much further."

"But you told me I could mention it to her."

"No, I didn't."

"You did, Edwin. Do be just."

"I didn't say you could go and plunge right into it at once. These things have to be thought out. Houses aren't bought like that. A house isn't a pound of tea, and it isn't a hat."

"I'm very sorry."

"No, you aren't. And you know jolly well you aren't. Your scheme was simply to tie my hands."

She knew the truth of this, and her smile became queer. Nevertheless the amiable calm which she maintained astonished even herself. She was not happy, but certainly she was not unhappy. She had got, or she was going to get, what she wanted; and here was the only fact important to her; the means by which she had got it, or was going to get it, were negligible now. It cost her very little to be magnanimous. She wondered at Edwin. Was this furious brute the timid worshipping boy who had so marvellously kissed her a dozen years earlier—before she had fallen into the hands of a scoundrel? Were these scenes what the exquisite romance of marriage had come to? . . . Well, and if it was so, what then? If she was not happy she was elated, and she was philosophic, and she had the terrific sense of realities of some of her sex. She was out of the Benbow house, she breathed free, she had triumphed, and she had her man to herself. He might be a brute—the Five Towns (she had noticed as a returned exile) were full of brutes whose passions surged and boiled, beneath the phlegmatic surface—but he existed, and their love existed. And a peep into the depth of the cauldron was exciting. . . . The injustice or the justice of his behaviour did not make a live question.

Moreover, she did not in truth seriously regard him as a brute. She regarded him as an unreasonable creature, something like a baby, to be humoured in the inessentials of a matter of which the essentials were now definitely in her favour. His taunt that she went blundering into a thing, and that she knew naught of business, amused her. She knew

her own business, and knew it profoundly. The actual situation was a proof of that. As for abstract principles of business, the conventions and etiquette of it, her lips condescendingly curled. After all, what had she done to merit this fury? Nothing! Nothing! What could it matter whether the negotiations were begun instantly or in a week's or a month's time? (Edwin would have dilly-dallied probably for three months or six.) She had merely said a few harmless words, offered a suggestion. And now he desired to tear her limb from limb and eat her alive. It was comical! Impossible for her to be angry, in her triumph! It was too comical! She had married an astounding personage. . . . But she *had* married him. He was hers. She exulted in the possession of him. His absurd peculiarities did not lower him in her esteem. She had a perfect appreciation of his points, including his general wisdom. But she was convinced that she had a special and different and superior kind of wisdom.

"And a nice thing you've let Maggie in for!" Edwin broke out afresh after a spell of silent walking.

"Let Maggie in for?" she exclaimed lightly.

"Albert ought never to have known anything of it until it was all settled. He will be yarning away to her about how he can use her money for her, and what he gets hold of she'll never see again,—you may bet your boots on that. If you'd left it to me I could have fixed things up for her in advance. But no! *In* you must go! Up to the neck! And ruin everything!"

"Oh!" she said reassuringly. "You'll be able to look after Maggie all right."

He sniffed, and settled down into embittered disgust, quickening somewhat his speed up the slope of Acre Lane.

"Please don't walk so fast, Edwin," she breathed, just like a nice little girl. "I can't keep up with you."

In spite of his enormous anger he could not refuse such a request. She was getting the better of him again. He knew it; he could see through the devices. With an irritated swing of his body he slowed down to suit her.

She had a glimpse of his set, gloomy, savage, ruthless face, the lower lip bulging out. Really it was grotesque! Were they grown up, he and she? She smiled almost self-con-

sciously, fearing that passers-by might notice his preposterous condition. All the way up Acre Lane and across by St. Luke's Churchyard into Trafalgar Road they walked thus side by side in silence. By strange good luck they did not meet a single acquaintance, and as Edwin had a latchkey, no servant had to come and open the door and behold them.

Edwin, throwing his hat on the stand, ran immediately upstairs. Hilda passed idly into the drawing-room. She was glad to be in her own drawing-room again. It was a distinguished apartment, after Clara's. There lay the Dvorak music on the piano. . . . The atmosphere seemed full of ozone. She rang for Ada and spoke to her with charming friendliness about Master George. Master George had returned from an informal cricket match in the Manor Fields, and was in the garden. Yes, Ada had seen to his school-clothes. Everything was in order for the new term shortly to commence. But Master George had received a blow from the cricket-ball on his shin, which was black and blue. . . . Had Ada done anything to the shin? No, Master George would not let her touch it, but she had been allowed to see it. . . . Very well, Ada. . . . There was something beatific about the state of being mistress of a house. Without the mistress, the house would simply crumble to pieces.

Hilda went upstairs; she was apprehensive, but her apprehensiveness was agreeable to her. . . . No, Edwin was not in the bedroom. . . . She could hear him in the bathroom. She tried the door. It was bolted. He always bolted it.

"Edwin!"

"What is it?"

He opened the door. He was in his shirt-sleeves and had just finished with the towel. She entered, and shut the door and bolted it. And then she began to kiss him. She kissed him time after time, on his cheek so damp and fresh.

"Poor dear!" she murmured.

She knew that he could not altogether resist those repeated kisses. They were more effective than the best arguments or the most graceful articulate surrenders. Thus she completed her triumph. But whether the virtue of the kisses lay in their sensuousness or in their sentiment, neither he nor

she knew. And she did not care. . . . She did not kiss him with abandonment. There was a reserve in her kisses, and in her smile. Indeed she went on kissing him rather sternly. Her glance, when their eyes were very close together, was curious. It seemed to imply: "We are in love. And we love. I am yours. You are mine. Life is very fine after all. I am a happy woman. But still—*each is for himself in this world*, and that's the bedrock of marriage as of all other institutions." Her sense of realities again! And she went on kissing, irresistibly.

"Kiss me."

And he had to kiss her.

Whereupon she softened to him, and abandoned herself to the emanations of his charm, and her lips became almost liquid as she kissed him again; nevertheless there was still a slight reserve in her kisses.

At tea she chattered like a magpie, as the saying is. Between her and George there seemed to be a secret instinctive understanding that Edwin had to be humoured, enlivened, drawn into talk,—for although he had kissed her, his mood was yet by no means restored to the normal. He would have liked to remain, majestic, within the tent of his soul. But they were too clever for him. Then, to achieve his discomforted Johnnie Orgreave, with a suggestion that they should all four—Edwin, Hilda, Janet, and himself—go to the theatre at Hanbridge that night. Hilda accepted the idea instantly. Since her marriage, her appetite for pleasure had developed enormously. At moments she was positively greedy for pleasure. She was incapable of being bored at the theatre, she would sooner be in the theatre of a night than out of it.

"Oh! Do let's go!" she cried.

Edwin did not want to go, but he had to concur. He did not want to be pleasant to Johnnie Orgreave or to anybody, but he had to be pleasant.

"Be on the first car that goes up after seven-fifteen," said Johnnie as he was departing.

Edwin grunted.

"You understand, Teddy? The first car that goes up after seven-fifteen."

"All right! All right!"

Blithely Hilda went to beautify herself. And when she had beautified herself and made herself into a queen of whom the haughtiest master-printer might be proud, she dispatched Ada for Master George. And Master George had to come to her bedroom.

"Let me look at that leg," she said. "Sit down."

Devious creature! During tea she had not even divulged that she had heard of the damaged shin. Master George was taken by surprise. He sat down. She knelt, and herself unloosed the stocking and exposed the little calf. The place was black and blue, but it had a healthy look.

"It's nothing," she said.

And then, all in her splendid finery, she kissed the dirty discoloured shin. Strange! He was only two years old and just learning to talk.

"Now then, missis! Here's the tram!" Edwin yelled out loudly, roughly, from below. He would have given a sovereign to see her miss the car, but his inconvenient sense of justice forced him to warn her.

"Coming! Coming!"

She kissed Master George on the mouth eagerly, and George seemed, unusually, to return the eagerness. She ran down the darkening stairs, ecstatic.

In the dusky road, Edwin curtly signalled to the vast ascending steam-car, and it stopped. That was in the old days, when people did what they liked with the cars, stopping them here and stopping them there according to their fancy. The era of electricity and fixed stopping-places, and soulless, conscienceless control from London had not set in. Edwin and Hilda mounted. Two hundred yards farther on the steam-tram was once more arrested, and Johnnie and Janet joined them. Hilda was in the highest spirits. The great affair of the afternoon had not been a quarrel, but an animating experience which, though dangerous, intensified her self-confidence and her zest.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE WEEK-END

#### I

**T**HE events of the portentous week-end which included the musical evening began early on the Saturday, and the first one was a chance word uttered by George.

Breakfast was nearly over in the Clayhanger dining-room. Hilda sat opposite to Edwin, and George between them. They had all eaten with appetite, and the disillusion which usually accompanies the satisfaction of desire was upon them. They had looked forward to breakfast, scenting with zest its pleasing odours, and breakfast was over, save perhaps for a final unnecessary piece of toast or half a cup of chilled coffee.

Hilda did not want to move, because she did not care for the Saturday morning task of shopping and revictualling and being bland with fellow-shoppers in the emporiums. The house-doors were too frequently open on Saturday mornings, and errand-boys thereat, and a wind blowing through the house, and it was the morning for specially cleaning the hall—detestable and damp operation—and servants seemed loose on Saturday morning, and dinner was apt to be late. But Hilda knew she would have to move. To postpone was only to aggravate. Destiny grasped her firm. George was not keen about moving, because he had no plan of campaign; the desolating prospect of resuming school on Monday had withered his energy; he was in a mood to be either a martyr or a villain. Edwin was lazily sardonic, partly because the leisure of breakfast was at an end, partly because he hated the wage-paying slackness of Saturday morning at the shop, and partly because his relations with Hilda had remained indefinite and disquieting, despite a thousand mutual ur-

banities and thoughtful refinements, and even some caresses. A sense of aimlessness dejected him ; and in the central caves of his brain the question was mysteriously stirring : What is the use of all these things—success, dignity, importance, luxury, love, sensuality, order, moral superiority ? He foresaw thirty years of breakfasts, with plenty of the finest home-cured bacon and fresh eggs, but no romance.

Before his marriage he used to read the paper honestly and rudely at breakfast. That is to say, he would prop it up squarely in front of him, hiding his sister Maggie, and anyhow ignoring her ; and Maggie had to ' like it or lump it ' ; she probably lumped it. But upon marriage he had become a chevalier ; he had nobly decided that it was not correct to put a newspaper between yourself and a woman who had denied you nothing. Nevertheless, his appetite for newspapers being almost equal to his appetite for bacon, he would still take nips at the newspaper during breakfast, hold it in one hand, glance at it, drop it, pick it up, talk amiably while glancing at it, drop it, pick it up again. So long as the newspaper was held aside and did not touch the table, so long as he did not read more than ten lines at a time, he considered that punctilio was satisfied, and that he was not in fact reading the newspaper at all. But towards the end of breakfast, when the last food was disappearing, and he lapped the cream off the news, he would hold the newspaper in both hands—and brazenly and conscientiously read. His chief interest, just then, was political. Like most members of his party, he was endeavouring to decipher the party programme and not succeeding, and he feared for his party and was a little ashamed for it. Grave events had occurred. The sub-structure of the State was rocking. A newly-elected supporter of the Government, unaware that he was being admitted to the best club in London, had gone to the House of Commons in a tweed cap and preceded by a brass band. Serious pillars of society knew that the time had come to invest their savings abroad. Edwin, with many another ardent Liberal, was seeking to persuade himself that everything was all right after all. The domestic atmosphere—Hilda's baffling face, the emptied table, the shadow of business, repletion, early symptoms of indigestion, the sound of a slop-pail in the

hall—did not aid him to optimism. In brief, the morning was a fair specimen of a kind of morning that seemed likely to be for him an average morning.

“Can’t I leave the table, mother?” asked George discontentedly.

Hilda nodded.

George gave a coarse sound of glee.

“George! . . . That’s so unlike you!” his mother frowned.

Instead of going directly towards the door, he must needs pass right round the table, behind the chair of his occupied uncle. As he did so, he scanned the newspaper and read out loudly in passing for the benefit of the room:

“‘Local Divorce Case. Etches *v.* Etches. Painful Details.’”

The words meant nothing to George. They had happened to catch his eye. He read them as he might have read an extract from the books of Euclid, and noisily and ostentatiously departed, not without a further protest from Hilda.

And Edwin and Hilda, left alone together, were self-conscious.

“Lively kid!” murmured Edwin self-consciously.

And Hilda, self-consciously:

“You never told me that case was on.”

“I didn’t know till I saw it here.”

“What’s the result?”

“Not finished. . . . Here you are, if you want to read it.”

He handed the sheet across the table. Despite his serious interest in politics he had read the report before anything else. Etches *v.* Etches, indeed, surpassed Gladstonian politics as an aid to the dubious prosperity of the very young morning newspaper, which represented the latest and most original attempt to challenge the journalistic monopoly of the afternoon “Staffordshire Signal.” It lived scarcely longer than the divorce case, for the proprietors, though Nonconformists and therefore astute, had failed to foresee that the Five Towns public would not wait for racing results until the next morning.

“Thanks,” Hilda amiably and negligently murmured.

Edwin hummed.

Useless for Hilda to take that casual tone! Useless for Edwin to hum! The unconcealable thought in both their minds was—and each could divine the other's thought, and almost hear its vibration:

“We might end in the divorce court, too.”

Hence their self-consciousness.

The thought was absurd, irrational, indefensible, shocking; it had no father and no mother, it sprang out of naught, but it existed, and it had force enough to make them uncomfortable.

The Etches couple, belonging to the great, numerous, wealthy, and respectable family of Etches, had been married barely a year.

Edwin rose and glanced at his well-tinted finger-nails. The pleasant animation of his skin caused by the bath was still perceptible; he could feel it in his back, and it helped his conviction of virtue. He chose a cigarette out of his silver case—a good cigarette, a good case—and lit it, and waved the match into extinction, and puffed out much smoke, and regarded the correctness of the crease in his trousers (the vertical trouser-crease having recently been introduced into the district and insisted on by that tailor and artist and seeker after perfection, Shillitoe), and walked firmly to the door. But the self-consciousness remained.

Just as he reached the door, his wife, gazing at the newspaper, stopped him:

“Edwin.”

“What's up?”

He did not move from the door, and she did not look up from the newspaper.

“Seen your friend Big James this morning?”

Edwin usually went down to business before breakfast, so that his conscience might be free for a leisurely meal at nine o'clock. Big James was the oldest employee in the business. Originally he had been foreman compositor, and was still technically so described, but in fact he was general manager, and Edwin's majestic vicegerent in all the printing-shops. “Ask Big James” was the watchword of the whole organism.

“No,” said Edwin. “Why?”

"Oh, nothing! It doesn't matter."

Edwin had made certain resolutions about his temper, but it seemed to him that such a reply justified annoyance, and he therefore permitted himself to be annoyed, failing to see that serenity is a positive virtue only when there is justification for annoyance. The nincompoop had not even begun to perceive that what is called 'right-living' means the acceptance of injustice and the excusing of the inexcusable.

"Now then," he said brusquely. "Out with it." But there was still a trace of rough tolerance in his voice.

"No. It's all right. I was wrong to mention it."

Her admission of sin did not in the least placate him.

He advanced towards the table.

"You haven't mentioned it," she said stiffly.

Their eyes met, as Hilda's quitted the newspaper. He could not read hers. She seemed very calm. He thought as he looked at her: "How strange it is that I should be living with this woman! What is she to me? What do I know of her?"

She said with tranquillity:

"If you do see Big James you might tell him not to trouble himself about that programme."

"Programme? What programme?" he asked, startled.

"Oh, Edwin!" she gave a little laugh. "The musical-evening programme, of course. Aren't we having a musical evening to-morrow night?"

More justification for annoyance! Why should she confuse the situation by pretending that he had forgotten the musical evening? The pretence was idiotic, deceiving no one. The musical evening was constantly being mentioned. Reports of assiduous practising had reached them; and on the previous night they had had quite a subdued altercation over a proposal of Hilda's for altering the furniture in the drawing-room.

"This is the first I've heard of any programme," said Edwin. "Do you mean a printed programme?"

Of course she could mean nothing else. He was absolutely staggered at the idea that she had been down to his works, without a word to him, and given orders to Big James, or even talked to Big James, about a programme. She had no remorse. She had no sense of danger. Had she the slightest



conception of what business was? Imagine Maggie attempting such a thing! It was simply not conceivable. A wife going to her husband's works, and behind his back giving orders——! It was as though a natural law had suspended its force.

"Why, Edwin," she said in extremely clear, somewhat surprised, and gently benevolent accents. "Whatever's the matter with you? There *is* a programme of music, I suppose?" (There she was, ridiculously changing the meaning of the word programme! What infantile tactics!) "It occurred to me all of a sudden yesterday afternoon how nice it would be to have it printed on gilt-edged cards, so I ran down to the shop, but you weren't there. So I saw Big James."

"You never said anything to me about it last night, nor this morning."

"Didn't I? . . . Well, I forgot."

Grotesque creature!

"Well, what did Big James say?"

"Oh! Don't ask me. But if he treats all your customers as he treated me. . . . However, it doesn't matter now. I shall write the programme out myself."

"What did he say?"

"It wasn't what he said. . . . But he's very rude, you know. Other people think so too."

"What other people?"

"Oh! Never mind who! Of course, *I* know how to take it. And I know you believe in him blindly. But his airs are preposterous. And he's a dirty old man. And I say, Edwin, seeing how very particular you are about things at home, you really ought to see that the front shop is kept cleaner. It's no affair of mine, and I never interfere,—but really . . .!"

Not a phrase of this speech but what was highly and deliberately provocative. Assuredly no other person had ever said that Big James was rude. (But *had* some one else said so, after all? Suppose, challenged, she gave a name!) Big James's airs were not preposterous; he was merely old and dignified. His apron and hands were dirty, naturally. . . . And then the implication that Big James was a fraud, and that he, Edwin, was simpleton enough to be

victimized by the fraud, while the great all-seeing Hilda exposed it at a single glance! And the implication that he, Edwin, was fussy at home, and negligent at the shop! And the astounding assertion that she never interfered!

He smothered up all his feelings, with difficulty, as a sailor smothers up a lowered sail in a high wind, and merely demanded, for the third time:

"What did Big James say?"

"I was given to understand," said Hilda roguishly, "that it was quite, quite, quite impossible. But his majesty would see! . . . Well, he needn't 'see.' I see how wrong I was to suggest it at all."

Edwin moved away in silence.

"Are you going, Edwin?" she asked innocently.

"Yes," glumly.

"You haven't kissed me."

She did not put him to the shame of returning to her. No, she jumped up blithely, radiant. Her make-believe that nothing had happened was maddening. She kissed him lovingly, with a smile, more than once. He did not kiss; he was kissed. Nevertheless somehow the kissing modified his mental position, and he felt better after it.

"Don't work yourself up, darling," she counselled him, with kindness and concern, as he went out of the room. "You know how sensitive you are." It was a calculated insult, but an insult which had to be ignored. To notice it would have been a grave tactical error.

## II

When he reached the shop, he sat down at his old desk in the black-stained cubicle, and spied forth and around for the alleged dust which he would tolerate in business but would not tolerate at home. It was there. He could see places that had obviously not been touched for weeks, withdrawn places where the undisturbed mounds of stock and litter had the eternal character of Roman remains or vestiges of creation. The senior errand-boy was in the shop, snuffling over a blue-paper parcel.

"Boy," said Edwin. "What time do you come here in the morning?"

"'A'-past seven, sir."

"Well, on Monday morning you'll be here at seven, and you'll move everything—there and there and there—and sweep and dust properly. This shop's like a pigsty. I believe you never dust anything but the counters."

He was mild but firm. He knew himself for a just man; yet the fact that he was robbing this boy of half an hour's sleep and probably the boy's mother also, and upsetting the ancient order of the boy's household, did not trouble him, did not even occur to him. For him the boy had no mother and no household, but was a patent self-causing boy that came miraculously into existence on the shop doorstep every morning and achieved annihilation thereon every night.

The boy was a fatalist, but his fatalism had limits, because he well knew that the demand for errand-boys was greater than the supply. Though the limits of his fatalism had not yet been reached, he was scarcely pleased.

"If I come at seven who'll gi' me th' kays, sir?" he demanded rather surlily, wiping his nose on his sleeve.

"I'll see that you have the keys," said Edwin, with divine assurance, though he had not thought of the difficulty of the keys.

The boy left the shop, his body thrown out of the perpendicular by the weight of the blue-paper parcel.

"You ought to keep an eye on this place," said Edwin quietly to the young man who combined the function of clerk with that of salesman to the rare retail customers. "I can't see to everything. Here, check these wages for me." He indicated small piles of money.

"Yes, sir," said the clerk with self-respect, but admitting the justice of the animadversion.

Edwin seldom had difficulty with his employees. Serious friction was unknown in the establishment.

He went out by the back entrance, thinking:

"It's no affair whatever of hers. Moreover the shop's as clean as shops are, and a damned sight cleaner than most. A shop isn't a drawing-room. . . . And now there's the infernal programme."

He would have liked to bury and forget the matter of the programme. But he could not. His conscience, or her fussi-

ness, would force him to examine into it. There was no doubt that Big James was getting an old man, with peculiar pompous mannerisms and a disposition towards impossibilism. Big James ought to have remembered, in speaking to Hilda, that he was speaking to the wife of his employer. That Hilda should give an order, or even make a request, direct was perhaps unusual, but—dash it !—you knew what women were, and if that old josser of a bachelor, Big James, didn't know what women were, so much the worse for him. He should just give Big James a hint. He could not have Big James making mischief between himself and Hilda.

But the coward would not go straight to Big James. He went first up to what had come to be called ' the litho room,' partly in order to postpone Big James, but partly also because he had quite an affectionate proud interest in the litho room. In Edwin's childhood this room, now stripped and soiled into a workshop, had been the drawing-room of the Clayhanger family ; and it still showed the defect which it had always shown ; the window was too small and too near the corner of the room. No transformation could render it satisfactory save a change in the window. Old Darius Clayhanger had vaguely talked of altering the window. Edwin had thought seriously of it. But nothing had been done. Edwin was continuing the very policy of his father which had so roused his disdain when he was young : the policy of ' making things do.' Instead of entering upon lithography in a manner bold, logical, and decisive, he had nervously and half-heartedly slithered into it. Thus at the back of the yard was a second-hand " Newsom " machine in quarters too small for it, and the apparatus for the preliminary polishing of the stones ; while up here in the ex-drawing-room were grotesquely mingled the final polishing process and the artistic department.

The artist who drew the designs on the stone was a German, with short fair hair and moustache, a thick neck and a changeless expression. Edwin had surprisingly found him in Hanbridge. He was very skilled in judging the amount of ' work ' necessary on the stone to produce a desired result on the paper, and very laborious. Without him the nascent lithographic trade could not have prospered. His wages were extremely

moderate, but they were what he had asked, and in exchange for them he gave his existence. Edwin liked to watch him drawing, slavishly, meticulously, endlessly. He was absolutely without imagination, artistic feeling, charm, urbanity or elasticity of any sort,—a miracle of sheer gruff positiveness. He lived somewhere in Hanbridge, and had once been seen by Edwin on a Sunday afternoon, wheeling a perambulator and smiling at a young enceinte woman who held his free arm. An astounding sight, which forced Edwin to adjust his estimates! He grimly called himself an Englishman, and was legally entitled to do so. On this morning he was drawing a ewer and basin, for the illustrated catalogue of an earthenware manufacturer.

“Not a very good light to-day,” murmured Edwin.

“Eh?”

“Not a very good light.”

“No,” said Karl sourly and indifferently, bent over the stone, and breathing with calm regularity. “My eyesight is being de-stroit.”

Behind, a young man in a smock was industriously polishing a stone.

Edwin beheld with pleasure. It was a joy to think that here was the sole lithography in Bursley, and that his own enterprise had started it. Nevertheless he was ashamed too,—ashamed of his hesitations, his half-measures, his timidity, and of Karl’s impaired eyesight. There was no reason why he should not build a proper works, and every reason why he should; the operation would be remunerative; it would set an example; it would increase his prestige. He grew resolute. On the day of the party at the Benbows he had been and carefully inspected the plot of land at Shawport, and yesterday he had made a very low offer for it. If the offer was refused, he would raise it. He swore to himself he would have his works.

Then Big James came into the litho room.

“I was seeking ye, sir,” said Big James majestically, with a mysterious expression.

Edwin tried to look at him anew, as it were with Hilda’s eyes. Certainly his bigness amounted now to an enormity, for proportionately his girth more than matched his excessive



height. His apron descended from the semicircle of his paunch like a vast grey wall. The apron was dirty, this being Saturday, but it was at any rate intact ; in old days Big James and others at critical moments of machining used to tear strips off their aprons for machine-rags. . . . Yes, he was conceivably a grotesque figure, with his spectacles, which did not suit him, his heavy breathing, his mannerisms, and his grandiose air of Atlas supporting the moral world. A woman might be excused for seeing the comic side of him. But surely he was honest and loyal. Surely he was not the adder that Hilda with an intonation had suggested !

"I'm coming," said Edwin, rather curtly.

He felt just in the humour for putting Big James 'straight.' Still his reply had not been too curt, for to his staff he was the opposite of a bully ; he always scorned to take a facial advantage of his power, often tried even to conceal his power in the fiction that the employee was one man and himself merely another. He would be far more devastating to his wife and his sister than to any employee. But at intervals a bad or careless workman had to meet the blaze of his eye and accept the lash of his speech.

"It's about that little job for the mistress, sir," said Big James in a soft voice, when they were out on the landing.

Edwin gave a start. The ageing man's tones were so eager, so anxiously loyal ! His emphasis on the word 'mistress' conveyed so clearly that the mistress was a high and glorious personage to serve whom was an honour and a fearful honour ! The ageing man had almost whispered, like a boy, glancing with jealous distrust at the shut door of the room that contained the German.

"Oh !" muttered Edwin, taken aback.

"I set it up myself," said Big James, and holding his head very high looked down at Edwin under his spectacles.

"Why !" said Edwin cautiously. "I thought you'd given Mrs. Clayhanger the idea it couldn't be done in time ?"

"Bless ye, sir ! Not if I know it ! I intimated to her the situation in which we were placed, with urgent jobs on hand, as in duty bound, sir, she being the mistress. Ye know how slow I am to give a promise—sir. But not to do it,

such was not my intention. And as I have said already, sir, I've set it up myself, and here's a rough pull."

He produced a piece of paper.

Edwin's ancient affection for Big James grew indignant. The old fellow was the very mirror of loyalty. He might be somewhat grotesque and mannered upon occasion, but he was the soul of the Clayhanger business. He had taught Edwin most of what he knew about both type-setting and machining. It seemed not long since that he used to call Edwin 'young sir,' and to enter into tacit leagues with him against the dangerous obstinacies of his decaying father. Big James had genuinely admired Darius Clayhanger. Assuredly he admired Darius's son not less. His fidelity to the dynasty was touching; it was wistful. The order from the mistress had tremendously excited and flattered him in his secret heart. . . . And yet Hilda must call him names, must insinuate against his superb integrity, must grossly misrepresent his attitude to herself. Whatever in his pompous old way he might have said, she could not possibly have mistaken his anxiety to please her. No, she had given a false account of their interview,—and Edwin had believed it! Edwin now swerved violently back to his own original view. He firmly believed Big James against his wife. He reflected: "How simple I was to swallow all Hilda said without confirmation! I might have known!" And that he should think such a thought shocked him tremendously.

The programme was not satisfactorily set up. Apart from several mistakes in the spelling of proper names, the thing with its fancy types, curious centring, and superabundance of full-stops, resembled more the libretto of a Primitive Methodist Tea-meeting than a programme of classical music offered to refined dilettanti on a Sunday night. Though Edwin had endeavoured to modernize Big James, he had failed. It was perhaps well that he had failed. For the majority of customers preferred Big James's taste in printing to Edwin's. He corrected the misspellings and removed a few full-stops, and then said:

"It's all right. But I doubt if Mrs. Clayhanger'll care for all these fancy founts," implying that it was a pity, of course, that Big James's fancy founts would not be appreciated

at their true value, but women were women. "I should almost be inclined to set it all again in old-face. I'm sure she'd prefer it. Do you mind?"

"With the greatest *of* pleasure, sir," Big James heartily concurred, looking at his watch. "But I must be lively."

He conveyed his immense bulk neatly and importantly down the narrow stairs.

### III

Edwin sat in his cubicle again, his affection for Big James very active. How simple and agreeable it was to be a man among men only! The printing-business was an organism fifty times as large as the home, and it worked fifty times more smoothly. No misunderstandings, no secrecies (at any rate among the chief persons concerned), and a general recognition of the principles of justice! Even the errand-boy had understood. And the shop-clerk by his tone had admitted that he, too, was worthy of blame. The blame was not overdone, and common sense had closed the episode in a moment. And see with what splendid goodwill Big James, despite the intense conservatism of old age, had accepted the wholesale condemnation of his idea of a programme! The relations of men were truly wonderful, when you came to think about it. And to be at business was a relief and even a pleasure. Edwin could not remember having ever before regarded the business as a source of pleasure. A youth, he had gone into it greatly against his will, and by tradition he had supposed himself still to hate it.

Why had Hilda misled him as to Big James? For she had misled him. Yes, she had misled him. What was her motive? What did she think she could gain by it? He was still profoundly disturbed by this deception. "Why!" he thought, "I can't trust her! I shall have to be on my guard! I've been in the habit of opening my mouth and swallowing practically everything she says!" His sense of justice very sharply resented her perfidy to Big James. His heart warmed to the defence of the excellent old man. What had she got against Big James? Since the day when the enormous man had first shown her over the printing-shops, before their original betrothal, a decade and more ago, he

had never treated her with anything but an elaborate and sincere respect. Was she jealous of him, because of his, Edwin's, expressed confidence in and ancient regard for him, and because Edwin and he had always been good companions? Or had she merely taken a dislike to him,—a physical dislike? Edwin had noticed that some women had a malicious detestation for some old men, especially when the old men had any touch of the grotesque or the pompous. . . . Well, he should defend Big James against her. She should keep her hands off Big James. His sense of justice was so powerful in that moment that if he had had to choose between his wife and Big James he would have chosen Big James.

He came out of the cubicle into the shop, and arranged his countenance so that the clerk should suppose him to be thinking in tremendous concentration upon some complex problem of the business. And simultaneously Hilda passed up Duck Bank on the way to market. She passed so close to the shop that she seemed to brush it like a delicious, exciting, and exasperating menace. If she turned her head she could scarcely fail to see Edwin near the door of the shop. But she did not turn her head. She glided up the slope steadily and implacably. And even in the distance of the street her individuality showed itself mysterious and strong. He could never decide whether she was beautiful or not; he felt that she was impressive, and not to be scorned or ignored. Perhaps she was not beautiful. Certainly she was not young. She had not the insipidity of the young girl unfulfilled. Nor did she inspire melancholy like the woman just beyond her prime. The one was going to be; the other had been. Hilda was. And she had lived. There was in her none of the detestable ignorance and innocence that, for Edwin, spoilt the majority of women. She knew. She was an equal, and a dangerous equal. Simultaneously he felt that he could crush and kill the little thing, and that he must beware of the powerful, unscrupulous, inscrutable individuality. . . . And she receded still higher up Duck Bank and then turned round the corner to the Market Place and vanished. And there was a void.

She would return. As she had receded gradually, so she would gradually approach the shop again with her delicious, exciting, exasperating menace. And he had a scheme for

running out to her and with candour inviting her in and explaining to her in just the right tone of goodwill that loyalty to herself simply hummed and buzzed in the shop and the printing-works, and that Big James worshipped her, and that though she was perfect in sagacity she had really been mistaken about Big James. And he had a vision of her smiling kindly and frankly upon Big James, and Big James twisting upon his own axis in joyous pride. Nothing but goodwill and candour was required to produce this bliss.

But he knew that he would never run out to her and invite her to enter. The enterprise was perilous to the point of being foolhardy. With a tone, with a hesitation, with an undecipherable pout, she might, she would, render it absurd. . . . And then, his pride ! . . . At that moment young Alec Batchgrew, perhaps then the town's chief mooncalf, came down Duck Bank in dazzling breeches on a superb grey horses. And Edwin went abruptly back to work lest the noodle should rein in at the shop door and talk to him.

## IV

When he returned home, a few minutes before the official hour of one o'clock, he heard women's voices and laughter in the drawing-room. And as he stood in the hall, fingering the thin little parcel of six programmes which he had brought with him, the laughter overcame the voices and then expended itself in shrieks of quite uncontrolled mirth. The drawing-room door was half open. He stepped quietly to it.

The weather, after being thunderous, had cleared, and the part of the drawing-room near the open window was shot with rays of sunshine.

Janet Orgreave, all dressed in white, lay back in an easy chair ; she was laughing and wiping the tears from her eyes. At the piano sat very upright a seemingly rather pert young woman, not laughing, but smiling, with arch sparkling eyes fixed on the others ; this was Daisy Marrion, a cousin of Mrs. Tom Orgreave, and the next to the last unmarried daughter of a large family up at Hillport. Standing by the piano was a young timid girl of about sixteen, whom Edwin, who had not seen her before, guessed to be Janet's niece, Elaine, eldest daughter of Janet's elder sister in London ; Elaine's



approaching visit had been announced. These other two, like Janet, were in white. Lastly there was Hilda, in grey, with a black hat, laughing like a child. "They are all children," he thought as, unnoticed, he watched them in their bright fragile frocks and hats, and in their excessive gaiety, and in the strange abandon of their gestures. "They are a foreign race encamped among us men. Fancy women of nearly forty giggling with these girls as Janet and Hilda are giggling!" He felt much pleasure in the sight. It could not have happened in poor old Maggie's reign. It was delicious. It was one of the rewards of existence, for the grace of these creatures was surpassing. But at the same time it was hysterical and infantile. He thought: "I've been taking women too seriously." And his heart lightened somewhat.

Elaine saw him first. A flush flowed from her cheeks to her neck. Her body stiffened. She became intensely self-conscious. She could not speak, but she leaned forward and gazed with a passion of apprehension at Janet, as if murmuring: "Look! The enemy! Take care!" The imploring silent movement was delightful in its gawky ingenuousness.

"Do tell us some more, Daisy," Hilda implored weakly.

"There is no more," said Daisy, and then started: "Oh, Mr. Clayhanger! How long *have* you been there?"

He entered the room, yielding himself, proud, masculine, acutely aware of his sudden effect on these girls. For even Hilda was naught but a girl at the moment; and Janet was really a girl, though the presence of that shy niece, just awaking to her own body and to the world, made Janet seem old in spite of her slimness and of that smoothness of skin that was due to a tranquil, kind temperament. The shy niece was enchantingly constrained upon being introduced to Edwin, whom she was enjoined to call uncle. Only yesterday she must have been a child. Her marvellously clear complexion could not have been imitated by any aunt or elder sister.

"And now perhaps you'll tell me what it's all about," said Edwin.

Hilda replied:

"Janet's called about tennis. It seems they're sick of

the new Hillport Club. I knew they would be. And so next year Janet's having a private club on her lawn——"

"Bad as it is," said Janet.

"Where the entire conversation won't be remarks by girls about other girls' frocks and remarks by men about the rotten inferiority of other men."

"This is all very sound," said Edwin, rather struck by Hilda's epigrammatic quality. "But what I ask is—what were you laughing at?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Daisy Marrion.

"Very well then," said Edwin, going to the door and shutting it. "Nobody leaves this room till I know. . . . Now, niece Elaine!"

Elaine went crimson and squirmed on her only recently hidden legs, but she did not speak.

"Tell him, Daisy," said Janet.

Daisy sat still straighter.

"It was only about Alec Batchgrew, Mr. Clayhanger; I suppose you know him?"

Alec was the youngest scion of the great and detested plutocratic family of Batchgrew—enormously important in his nineteen years.

"Yes, I know him," said Edwin. "I saw him on his new grey horse this morning."

"His 'orse," Janet corrected. They all began to laugh again loudly.

"He's taken a terrific fancy to Maud, my kiddie sister," said Daisy. "She's sixteen. Yesterday afternoon at the tennis club he said to Maud: 'Look 'ere. I shall ride through the town to-morrow morning on my 'orse, while you're all marketing. I shan't take any notice of any of the other girls, but if you bow to me I'll take my 'at off to you.'" She imitated the Batchgrew intonation.

"That's a good tale," said Edwin calmly. "What a cuckoo! He ought to be put in a museum."

Daisy, made rather nervous by the success of her tale, bent over the piano, and skimmed *pianissimo* and rapidly through the 'Clytie' waltz. Elaine moved her shoulders to the rhythm.

Janet said they must go.

"Here! Hold on a bit!" said Edwin, through the light film of music, and undoing the little parcel he handed one specimen of the programme to Hilda and another to Janet, simultaneously.

"Oh, so my ideas *are* listened to, sometimes!" murmured Hilda, who was, however, pleased.

A malicious and unjust remark, he thought. But the next instant Hilda said in a quite friendly natural tone:

"Janet's going to bring Elaine. And she says Tom says she is to tell you that he's coming whether he's wanted or not. Daisy won't come."

"Why?" asked Edwin, but quite perfunctorily; he knew that the Marrions were not interested in interesting music, and his design had been to limit the audience to enthusiasts.

"Church," answered Daisy succinctly.

"Come after church."

She shook her head.

"And how's the practising?" Edwin inquired from Janet.

"Pretty fair," said she. "But not so good as this programme. What swells we are, my word!"

"Hilda's idea," said Edwin generously. "Your mother coming?"

"Oh, yes, I think so."

As the visitors were leaving, Hilda stopped Janet.

"Don't you think it'll be better if we have the piano put over there, and all the chairs together round here, Janet?"

"It might be," said Janet uncertainly.

Hilda turned sharply to Edwin:

"There! What did I tell you?"

"Well," he protested good-humouredly, "what on earth do you expect her to say, when you ask her like that? Anyhow I may announce definitely that I'm not going to have the piano moved. We'll try things as they are, for a start, and then see. Why, if you put all the chairs together over here, the place'll look like a blooming boarding-house."

The comparison was a failure in tact, which he at once recognized but could not retrieve. Hilda faintly reddened, and the memory of her struggles as manageress of a boarding-house was harshly revived in her.

"Some day I shall try the piano over there," she said, low.

And Edwin concurred, amiably :

"All right. Some day we'll try it together, just to see what it *is* like."

The girls, the younger ones still giggling, slipped elegantly out of the house, one after another.

Dinner passed without incident.

v

The next day, Sunday, Edwin had a headache ; and it was a bilious headache. Hence he insisted to himself and to every one that it was not a bilious headache, but just one of those plain headaches which sometimes visit the righteous without cause or excuse ; for he would never accept the theory that he had inherited his father's digestive weakness. A liability to colds he would admit, but not on any account a feeble stomach. Hence, further, he was obliged to pretend to eat as usual. George was rather gnat-like that morning, and Hilda was in a susceptible condition, doubtless due to nervousness occasioned by the novel responsibilities of the musical evening—and a Sabbath musical evening at that ! After the one o'clock dinner, Edwin lay down on the sofa in the dining-room and read and slept ; and when he woke up he felt better, and was sincerely almost persuaded that his headache had not been and was not a bilious headache. He said to himself that a sharp walk might disperse the headache entirely. He made one or two trilling adjustments in the disposition of the drawing-room furniture—his own disposition of it, and immensely and indubitably superior to that so pertinaciously advocated by Hilda—and then he went out. Neither Hilda nor George was visible. Possibly during his rest they had gone for a walk ; they had fits of intimacy.

He walked in the faint September sunshine down Trafalgar Road into the town. Except for a few girls in dowdy finery and a few heavy youths with their black or dark-blue trousers turned up round the ankles far enough to show the white cotton lining, the street was empty. The devout at that hour were either dozing at home or engaged in Sunday-school work ; thousands of children were concentrated in the hot Sunday schools. As he passed the Bethesda Chapel and school

he heard the voices of children addressing the Lord of the Universe in laudatory and intercessory song. Near the Bethesda Chapel, by the Duke of Cambridge Vaults, two men stood waiting, their faces firm in the sure knowledge that within three hours the public-houses would again be open. Thick smoke rose from the chimneys of several manufactories and thin smoke from the chimneys of many others. The scheme of a Sunday musical evening in that land presented itself to Edwin as something rash, fantastic, and hopeless, —and yet solacing. Were it known it could excite only hostility, horror, contempt, or an intense bovine indifference ; chiefly the last. . . . Breathe the name of Chopin in that land ! . . .

As he climbed Duck Bank he fumbled in his pocket for his private key of the shop, which he had brought with him ; for, not the desire for fresh air, but an acute curiosity as to the answer to his letter to the solicitor to the Hall trustees making an offer for the land at Shawport, had sent him out of the house. Would the offer be accepted or declined, or would a somewhat higher sum be suggested ? The reply would have been put into the post on Saturday, and was doubtless then lying in the letter-box within the shop. The whole future seemed to be lying unopened in that letter-box.

He penetrated into his own shop like a thief, for it was not meet for an important tradesman to be seen dallying with business of a Sunday afternoon. As he went into the shutter-darkened interior he thought of Hilda, whom many years earlier he had kissed in that very same shutter-darkened interior one Thursday afternoon. Life appeared incredible to him, and in his wife he could see almost no trace of the girl he had kissed there in the obscure shop. There was a fair quantity of letters in the box. The first one he opened was from a solicitor ; not the solicitor to the Hall trustees, but Tom Orgreave, who announced to Edwin Clayhanger, Esquire, dear sir, that his clients the Palace Porcelain Company of Longshaw, felt compelled to call their creditors together. The Palace Porcelain Company, who had believed in the efficacy of printed advertising matter and expensive catalogues, owed Edwin a hundred and eighty pounds. It was a blow, and the more so in that it was unexpected. “ Did I come messing



down here on a Sunday afternoon to receive this sort of news ? ” he bitterly asked. A moment earlier he had not doubted the solvency of the Palace Porcelain Company ; but now he felt that the Company wouldn’t pay two shillings in the pound,—perhaps not even that, as there were debenture-holders. The next letter was an acceptance of his offer for the Shawport land. The die was cast, then. The new works would have to be created ; lithography would increase ; in the vast new enterprise, he would be hampered by the purchase of Maggie’s house ; he had just made a bad debt ; and he would have Hilda’s capricious opposition to deal with. He quitted the shop abruptly, locked the door, and went back home, his mind very active but undirected.

## VI

Something unfamiliar in the aspect of the breakfast-room as glimpsed through the open door from the hall, drew him within. Hilda had at last begun to make it into ‘ her ’ room. She had brought an old writing-desk from upstairs and put it between the fire-place and the window. Edwin thought : “ Doesn’t she even know the light ought to fall over the left shoulder, not over the right ? ” Letter paper and envelopes and even stamps were visible ; and a miscellaneous mass of letters and bills had been pushed into the space between the flat of the desk and the small drawers about it. There was also an easy chair, with a freshly-covered cushion on it ; a new hearthrug that Edwin neither recognized nor approved of ; several framed prints, and other oddments. His own portrait still dominated the mantelpiece, but it was now flanked by two brass candlesticks. He thought : “ If she’d asked me, I could have arranged it for her much better than that.” Nevertheless the idea of her being absolute monarch of the little room, and expressing her individuality in it and by it, both pleased and touched him. Nor did he at all resent the fact that she had executed her plan in secret. She must have been anxious to get the room finished for the musical evening.

Thence he passed into the drawing-room,—and was thunder-struck. The arrangement of the furniture was utterly changed and the resemblance to a boarding-house parlour after all

achieved. The piano had crossed the room ; the chairs were massed together in the most ridiculous way ; the sofa was so placed as to be almost useless. His anger was furious but cold. The woman had considerable taste in certain directions, but she simply did not understand the art of fixing up a room, whereas he did. Each room in the house (save her poor little amateurish breakfast-room or 'boudoir') had been arranged by himself, even to small details,—and well arranged. Every one admitted that he had a talent for interiors. The house was complete before she ever saw it, and he had been responsible for it. He was not the ordinary inexperienced ignorant husband who 'leaves all that sort of thing to the missis.' Interiors mattered to him ; they influenced his daily happiness. The woman had clearly failed to appreciate the sacredness of the *status quo*. He appreciated it himself, and never altered anything without consulting her and definitely announcing his intention to alter. She probably didn't care a fig for the *status quo*. Her conduct was inexcusable. It was an attack on vital principles. It was an outrage. Doubtless, in her scorn for the *status quo*, she imagined that he would accept the *fait accompli*. She was mistaken. With astounding energy he set to work to restore the *status quo ante*. The vigour with which he dragged and pushed an innocent elephantine piano was marvellous. In less than five minutes not a trace remained of the *fait accompli*. He thought : "This is a queer start for a musical evening !" But he was triumphant, resolute, and remorseless. He would show her a thing or two. In particular he would show that fair play had to be practised in his house. Then, perceiving that his hands were dirty, and one finger bleeding, he went majestically, if somewhat breathless, upstairs to the bathroom, and washed with care. In the glass he saw that, despite his exertions, he was pale. At length he descended, wondering where she was, where she had hidden herself, who had helped her to move the furniture, and what exactly the upshot would be. There could be no doubt that he was in a state of high emotion, in which unflinching obstinacy was shot through with qualms about disaster.

He revisited the drawing-room to survey his labours. She was there. Whence she had sprung he knew not. But she

was there. He caught sight of her standing by the window before entering the room.

When he got into the room he saw that her emotional excitement far surpassed his own. Her lips and her hands were twitching; her nostrils dilated and contracted; tears were in her eyes.

"Edwin," she exclaimed very passionately, in a thick voice, quite unlike her usual clear tones, as she surveyed the furniture, "this is really too much!"

Evidently she thought of nothing but her resentment. No consideration other than her outraged dignity would have affected her demeanour. If a whole regiment of their friends had been watching at the door, her demeanour would not have altered. The bedrock of her nature had been reached.

"It's war, this is!" thought Edwin.

He was afraid; he was even intimidated by her anger; but he did not lose his courage. The determination to fight for himself, and to see the thing through no matter what happened, was not a bit weakened. An inwardly feverish but outwardly calm vindictive desperation possessed him. He and she would soon know who was the stronger.

At the same time he said to himself:

"I was hasty. I ought not to have acted in such a hurry. Before doing anything I ought to have told her quietly that I intended to have the last word as regards furniture in this house. I was within my rights in acting at once, but it wasn't very clever of me, clumsy fool!"

Aloud he said, with a kind of self-conscious snigger:

"What's too much?"

Hilda went on:

"You simply make me look a fool in my own house, before my own son and the servants."

"You've brought it on yourself," said he fiercely. "If you will do these idiotic things you must take the consequences. I told you I didn't want the furniture moved, and immediately my back's turned you go and move it. I won't have it, and so I tell you straight."

"You're a brute," she continued, not heeding him, obsessed by her own wound. "You're a brute!" She said

it with terrifying conviction. "Everybody knows it. Didn't Maggie warn me? You're a brute and a bully. And you do all you can to shame me in my own house. Who'd think I was supposed to be the mistress here? Even in front of my friends you insult me."

"Don't act like a baby. How do I insult you?"

"Talking about boarding-houses. Do you think Janet and all of them didn't notice it?"

"Well," he said, "let this be a lesson to you."

She hid her face in her hands and sobbed, moving towards the door.

He thought:

"She's beaten. She knows she's got to take it."

Then he said:

"Do *I* go altering furniture without consulting you? Do *I* do things behind your back? Never!"

"That's no reason why you should try to make me look a fool in my own house. I told Ada how I wanted the furniture, and George and I helped her. And then a moment afterwards you give them contrary orders. What will they think of me? Naturally they'll think I'm not your wife, but your slave. You're a brute." Her voice rose.

"I didn't give any orders. I haven't seen the damned servants and I haven't seen George."

She looked up suddenly:

"Then who moved the furniture?"

"I did."

"Who helped you?"

"Nobody helped me."

"But I was here only a minute or two since."

"Well, do you suppose it takes me half a day to move a few sticks of furniture?"

She was impressed by his strength and his swiftness, and apparently silenced; she had thought that the servants had been brought into the affair.

"You ought to know perfectly well," he proceeded, "I should never dream of insulting you before the servants. Nobody's more careful of your dignity than I am. I should like to see anybody do anything against your dignity while I'm here."

She was still sobbing.

"I think you ought to apologize to me," she blubbered.  
"Yes, I really do."

"Why should I apologize to you? You moved the furniture against my wish. I moved it against yours. That's all. You began. I didn't begin. You want everything your own way. Well, you won't have it."

She blubbered once more:

"You ought to apologize to me."

And then she wept hysterically.

He meditated sourly, harshly. He had conquered. The furniture was as he wished, and it would remain so. The enemy was in tears, shamed, humiliated. He had a desire to restore her dignity, partly because she was his wife and partly because he hated to see any human being beaten. Moreover, at the bottom of his heart he had a tremendous regard for appearances, and he felt fears for the musical evening. He could not contemplate the possibility of visitors perceiving that the host and hostess had violently quarrelled. He would have sacrificed almost anything to the social proprieties. And he knew that Hilda would not think of them, or at any rate would not think of them effectively. He did not mind apologizing to her, if an apology would give her satisfaction. He was her superior in moral force, and naught else mattered.

"I don't think I ought to apologize," he said, with a slight laugh. "But if you think so I don't mind apologizing. I apologize. There!" He dropped into an easy-chair.

To him it was as if he had said:

"You see what a magnanimous chap I am."

She tried to conceal her feelings, but she was pleased, flattered, astonished. Her self-respect returned to her rapidly.

"Thank you," she murmured, and added: "It was the least you could do."

At her last words he thought:

"Women are incapable of being magnanimous."

She moved towards the door.

"Hilda," he said.

She stopped.



"Come here," he commanded, with gentle bluntness.

She wavered towards him.

"Come here, I tell you," he said again.

He drew her down to him, all fluttering and sobbing and wet, and kissed her, kissed her several times ; and then, sitting on his knees, she kissed him. But, though she mysteriously signified forgiveness, she could not smile ; she was still far too agitated and out of control to be able to smile.

The scene was over. The proprieties of the musical evening were saved. Her broken body and soul huddled against him were agreeably wistful to his triumphant manliness. But he had had a terrible fright. And even now there was a certain mere bravado in his attitude. In his heart he was thinking :

"By Jove ! has it come to this ?"

The responsibilities of the future seemed too complicated, wearisome, and overwhelming. The earthly career of a bachelor seemed almost heavenly in its wondrous freedom. . . . Etches *v.* Etches. . . . The unexampled creature, so recently the source of ineffable romance, still sat on his knees, weighing them down. Suddenly he noticed that his head ached very badly—worse than it had ached all day.

## VII

The Sunday musical evening, beyond its artistic thrills and emotional quality, proved to be exciting as a social manifestation. Those present at it felt as must feel Russian conspirators in a back room of some big grey house of a Petrograd suburb when the secret printing-press begins to function before their eyes. This concert of profane harmonies, deliberately planned and pouring out through open windows to affront the ears of returners from church and chapel, was considered by its organizers as a remarkable event ; and rightly so. The Clayhanger house might have been a fortress, with the blood-red standard of art and freedom floating from a pole lashed to its chimney. Of course everybody pretended to everybody else that the musical evening was a quite ordinary phenomenon.

It was a success, and a flashing success, yet not unqualified. The performers—Tertius Ingpen on the piano, on the fiddle,

and on the clarinet, Janet Orgreave on the piano, and very timidly in a little song by Grieg, Tom Orgreave on the piano, and his contralto wife in two famous and affecting songs by Schumann and also on the piano, and Edwin, sick but obstinate, as turner-over of pages—all did most creditably. The music was given with ardent sympathy, and in none of it did any marked pause occur which had not been contemplated by the composer himself. But abstentions had thinned the women among the audience. Elaine Hill did not come, and, far more important, Mrs. Orgreave did not come. Her husband, old Osmond Orgreave, had not been expected, as of late (owing to the swift onset of renal disease, hitherto treated by him with some contempt) he had declined absolutely to go out at night; but Edwin had counted on Mrs. Orgreave. She simply sent word that she did not care to leave her husband, and that Elaine was keeping her company. Disappointment, keen but brief, resulted. Edwin's severe sick headache was also a drawback. It did, however, lessen the bad social effect of an altercation between him and Hilda, in which Edwin's part was attributed to his indisposition. This altercation arose out of an irresponsible suggestion from somebody that something else should be played instead of something else. Now, for Edwin, a programme was a programme,—sacred, to be executed regardless of every extrinsic consideration. And seeing that the programme was printed . . . ! Edwin negatived the suggestion instantly, and the most weighty opinion in the room agreed with him, but Hilda must needs fly out: "Why not change it? I'm sure it will be better," etc. Whereas she could be sure of nothing of the sort, and was incompetent to offer an opinion. And she unreasonably and unnecessarily insisted, despite Tertius Ingpen, and the change was made. It was astounding to Edwin that, after the shattering scene of the afternoon, she should be so foolhardy, so careless, so obstinate. But she was. He kept his resentment neatly in a little drawer in his mind, and glanced at it now and then. And he thought of Tertius Ingpen's terrible remark about women at Ingpen's first visit. He said to himself: "There's a lot in it, no doubt about that."

At the close of the last item, two of Brahms's Hungarian

dances for pianoforte duet (played with truly electrifying *brio* by little wizening Tom Orgreave and his wife), both Tertius Ingpen and Tom fussed self-consciously about the piano, triumphant, not knowing quite what to do next, and each looking rather like a man who has told a good story, and in the midst of the applause tries to make out by an affectation of casualness that the story is nothing at all.

"Of course," said Tom Orgreave carelessly, and glancing at the ground, as he usually did when speaking, "fine as those dances are on the piano, I should prefer to hear them with the fiddle."

"Why?" demanded Ingpen challengingly.

"Because they were written for the fiddle," said Tom Orgreave with finality.

"Written for the fiddle? Not a bit of it!"

With superiority outwardly unruffled, Tom said:

"Pardon me. Brahms wrote them for Joachim. I've heard him play them."

"So have I," said Tertius Ingpen lightly, but scornfully. "But they were written originally for pianoforte duet, as you played them to-night. Brahms arranged them afterwards for Joachim."

Tom Orgreave shook under the blow, for in musical knowledge his supremacy had never been challenged in Bleakridge.

"Surely——" he began weakly.

"My dear fellow, it is so," said Ingpen impatiently.

"Look it up," said Edwin, with false animation, for his head was thudding. "George, fetch the encyclopædia B—and J too."

Delighted, George ran off. He had been examining Johnnie Orgreave's watch, and it was to Johnnie he delivered the encyclopædia amid mock protests from his Uncle Edwin. More than one person had remarked the growing alliance between Johnnie and young George.

But the encyclopædia gave no light.

Then the eldest Swetnam (who had come by invitation at the last moment) said:

"I'm sure Ingpen is right."

He was not sure, but from the demeanour of the two

men he could guess, and he thought he might as well share the glory of Ingpen's triumph.

The next instant Tertius Ingpen was sketching out future musical evenings at which quartets and quintets should be performed. He knew men in the orchestra at the Theatre Royal, Hanbridge; he knew girl-violinists who could be drilled, and he was quite certain that he could get a 'cello. From this he went on to part-songs, and in answer to scepticism about local gift for music, said that during his visits of inspection to factories he had heard spontaneous part-singing 'that would knock spots off the Savoy chorus.' Indeed, since his return to it, Ingpen had developed some appreciation of certain aspects of his native district. He said that the kindly common sense with which as an inspector he was received on potbanks, surpassed anything in the whole country.

"Talking of potbanks, you'll get a letter from me about the Palace Porcelain Company," Tom Orgreave lifting his eyebrows muttered to Edwin with a strange gloomy constraint.

"I've had it," said Edwin. "You've got some nice clients, I must say."

In a moment, though Tom said not a word more, the Palace Porcelain Company was on the carpet, to Edwin's disgust. He hated to talk about a misfortune. But others beside himself were interested in the Palace Porcelain Company, and the news of its failure had boomed mysteriously through the Sabbath air of the district.

Hilda and Janet were whispering together. And Edwin, gazing at them, saw in them the giggling tennis-playing children of the previous day,—specimens of a foreign race encamped among the men.

Suddenly Hilda turned her head towards the men, and said:

"Of course *Edwin's* been let in!"

It was a reference to the Palace Porcelain Company. How ungracious! How unnecessary! How unjust! And somehow Edwin had been fearing it. And that was really why he had not liked the turn of the conversation,—he had been afraid of one of her darts!

Useless for Tom Swetnam to say that a number of business

men quite as keen as Edwin had been 'let in'! From her disdainful silence it appeared that Hilda's conviction of the unusual simplicity of her husband was impregnable.

"I hear you've got that Shawport land," said Johnnie Orgreave.

The mystic influences of music seemed to have been overpowered.

"Who told ye?" asked Edwin in a low voice, once more frightened of Hilda.

"Young Toby Hall. Met him at the Conservative Club last night."

But Hilda had heard.

"What land is that?" she demanded curtly.

"What land is that?" Johnnie mimicked her. "It's the land for the new works, missis."

Hilda threw her shoulders back, glaring at Edwin with a sort of outraged fury. Happily most of the people present were talking among themselves.

"You never told me," she muttered.

He said:

"I only knew this afternoon."

Her anger was unmistakable. She was no longer a fluttering feminine wreck on his manly knee.

"Well, good-bye," said Janet Orgreave startlingly to him. "Sorry I have to go so soon."

"You aren't going!" Edwin protested, with unnatural loudness. "What about the victuals? I shan't touch 'em myself. But they must be consumed. Here! You and I'll lead the way."

Half playfully he seized her arm. She glanced at Hilda uncertainly.

"Edwin," said Hilda very curtly and severely, "don't be so clumsy. Janet has to go at once. Mr. Orgreave is very ill—very ill indeed. She only came to oblige us." Then she passionately kissed Janet.

It was like a thunderclap in the room. Johnnie and Tom confirmed the news. Of the rest only Tom's wife and Hilda knew. Janet had told Hilda before the music began. Osmond Orgreave had been taken ill between five and six in the afternoon. Dr. Stirling had gone in at once, and pronounced



the attack serious. Everything possible was done ; even a nurse was obtained instantly, from the Clowes Hospital by the station. From reasons of sentiment, if from no other, Janet would have stayed at home and forgone the musical evening. But those Orgreaves at home had put their heads together and decided that Janet should still go, because without her the entire musical evening would crumble to naught. Here was the true reason of the absence of Mrs. Orgreave and Elaine—both unnecessary to the musical evening. The boys had come, and Tom's wife had come, because even considered only as an audience, the Orgreave contingent was almost essential to the musical evening. And so Janet, her father's especial favourite and standby, had come, and she had played, and not a word whispered except to Hilda. It was wondrous. It was impressive. All the Orgreaves departed, and the remnant of guests meditated in proud, gratified silence upon the singular fortitude and heroic common sense that distinguished their part of the world. The musical evening was dramatically over, the refreshments being almost wasted.

## VIII

Hilda was climbing on to the wooden-seated chair in the hall to put out the light there when she heard a noise behind the closed door of the kitchen, which she had thought to be empty. She went to the door and pushed it violently open. Not only was the gas flaring away in an unauthorized manner, not only were both servants (theoretically in bed) still up, capless and apronless and looking most curious in unrelieved black, but the adventurous and wicked George was surreptitiously with them, flattering them with his aristocratic companionship, and eating blancmange out of a cut-glass dish with a tablespoon. Twice George had been sent to bed. Once the servants had been told to go to bed. The worst of carnivals is that the dregs of the population, such as George, will take advantage of them to rise to the surface and, conscienceless and mischievous, set at defiance the conventions by which society protects itself.

She merely glanced at George ; the menace of her eyes was alarming. His lower lip fell ; he put down the dish and spoon, and slunk timorously past her on his way upstairs.

Then she said to the servants :

" You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, encouraging him ! Go to bed at once." And as they began nervously to handle the things on the table, she added more imperiously : " At once ! Don't keep me waiting. I'll see to all this."

And they followed George meekly.

She gazed in disgust at the general litter of broken refreshments, symbolizing the traditional inefficiency of servants, and extinguished the gas.

The three criminals were somewhat the victims of her secret resentment against Edwin, who, a mere martyred perambulating stomach, had retired. Edwin had defeated her in the afternoon ; and all the evening, in the disposition of the furniture, the evidence of his victory had confronted her. By prompt and brutal action, uncharacteristic of him and therefore mean, he had defeated her. True he had embraced and comforted her tears, but it was the kiss of a conqueror. And then, on the top of that, he had proved his commercial incompetence by making a large bad debt, and his commercial rashness by definitely adopting a scheme of whose extreme danger she was convinced. One part of her mind intellectually knew that he had not wilfully synchronized these events in order to wound her, but another part of her mind felt deeply that he had. She had been staggered by the revelation that he was definitely committed to the project of lithography and the new works. Not one word about the matter had he said to her since their altercation on the night of the reception ; and she had imagined that, with his usual indecision, he was allowing it to slide. She scarcely recognized her Edwin. Now she accused him of a malicious obstinacy, not understanding that he was involved in the great machine of circumstance and perhaps almost as much surprised as herself at the movement of events. At any rate she was being beaten once more, and her spirit rebelled. Through all the misfortunes previous to her marriage that spirit, if occasionally cowed, had never been broken. She had sat grim and fierce against even bum-bailiffs in her time. Yes, her spirit rebelled, and the fact that others had known about the Shawport land before she knew made her still more mutinous against destiny. She looked round dazed at the situation.

What ? The mild Edwin defying and crushing her ? It was scarcely conceivable. The tension of her nerves from this cause only was extreme. Add to it the strain of the musical evening, intensified by the calamity at the Orgreaves' !

A bell rang in the kitchen, and all the ganglions of her spinal column answered it. Had Edwin rung ? No. It was the front-door.

"Pardon me," said Tertius Ingpen when she opened. "But all my friends soon learn how difficult it is to get rid of me."

"Come in," she said, liking his tone, which flattered her by assuming her sense of humour.

"As I'm sleeping at the office to-night, I thought I might as well take one or two of my musical instruments after all. So I came back."

"You've been round ?" she asked, meaning round to the Orgreaves'.

"Yes."

"What is it, really ?"

"Well, it appears to be pericarditis supervening on renal disease. He lost consciousness, you know."

"Yes, I know. But what is pericarditis ?"

"Pericarditis is inflammation of the pericardium."

"And what's the pericardium ?"

They both smiled faintly.

"The pericardium is the membrane that encloses the heart. I don't mind telling you that I've only just acquired this encyclopædic knowledge from Stirling,—he was there."

"And is it supposed to be very dangerous ?"

"I don't know. Doctors never tell you anything except what you can find out for yourself."

After a little hesitating pause they went into the drawing-room, where the lights were still burning, and the full disorder of the musical evening persisted, including the cigarette-ash on the carpet. Tertius Ingpen picked up his clarinet case, took out the instrument, examined the mouthpiece lovingly and with tenderness laid it back.

"Do sit down a moment," said Hilda, sitting limply down. "It's stifling, isn't it ?"

"Let me open the window," he suggested politely.

As he returned from the window, he said, pulling his short beard :

"It was wonderful how those Orgreaves went through the musical evening, wasn't it? Makes you proud of being English. . . . I suppose Janet's a great friend of yours?"

His enthusiasm touched her, and her pride in Janet quickened to it. She gave a deliberate satisfied nod in reply to his question. She was glad to be alone with him in the silence of the house.

"Ed gone to bed?" he questioned, after another little pause.

Already he was calling her husband Ed, and with an affectionate intonation!

She nodded again.

"He stuck it out jolly well," said Ingpen, still standing.

"He brings these attacks on himself," said Hilda with the calm sententiousness of a good digestion discussing a bad one. She was becoming pleased with herself—with her expensive dress, her position, her philosophy, and her power to hold the full attention of this man.

Ingpen replied, looking steadily at her :

"We bring everything on ourselves."

Then he smiled as a comrade to another.

She shifted her pose. A desire to discuss Edwin with this man grew in her, for she needed sympathy intensely.

"What do *you* think of this new scheme of his?" she demanded somewhat self-consciously.

"The new works? Seems all right. But I don't know much about it."

"Well, I'm not so sure." And she exposed her theory of the entire satisfactoriness of their present situation, of the needlessness of fresh risks, and of Edwin's unsuitability for enterprise. "Of course he's splendid," she said. "But he'll never push. I can look at him quite impartially—I mean in all those things."

Ingpen murmured as it were dreamily :

"Have you had much experience of business yourself?"

"It depends what you call business. I suppose you know I used to keep a boarding-house?" She was a little defiant.

"No, I didn't know. I may have heard vaguely. Did you make it pay?"

"It did pay in the end."

"But not at first? . . . Any disasters?"

She could not decide whether she ought to rebuff the cross-examiner or not. His manner was so objective, so disinterested, so innocent, so disarming, that in the end she smiled uncertainly, raising her thick eyebrows.

"Oh, yes," she said bravely.

"And who came to the rescue?" Ingpen proceeded.

"Edwin did."

"I see," said Ingpen, still dreamily.

"I believe you knew all about it," she remarked, having flushed.

"Pardon me! Almost nothing."

"Of course you take Edwin's side."

"Are we talking man to man?" he asked suddenly, in a new tone.

"Most decidedly!" She rose to the challenge.

"Then I'll tell you my leading theory," he said in a soft, polite voice. "The proper place for women is the harem."

"Mr. Ingpen!"

"No, no!" he soothed her, but firmly. "We're talking man to man. I can whisper sweet nothings to you if you prefer it, but I thought we were trying to be honest. I hold a belief. I state it. I may be wrong, but I hold that belief. You can persecute me for my belief if you like. That's your affair. But surely you aren't afraid of an idea! If you don't like the mere word, let's call it *zenana*. Call it the drawing-room and kitchen."

"So we're to be kept to our sphere?"

"Now don't be resentful. Naturally you're to be kept to your own sphere. If Edwin began dancing around in the kitchen you'd soon begin to talk about *his* sphere. You can't have the advantages of married life for nothing—neither you nor he. But some of you women nowadays seem to expect them gratis. Let me tell you, everything has to be paid for on this particular planet. I'm a bachelor. I've often thought about marrying, of course. I might get married some day. You never know your luck. If I do——"



"You'll keep your wife in the harem, no doubt! And she'll have to accept without daring to say a word all the risks you choose to take."

"There you are again!" he said. "This notion that marriage ought to be the end of risks for a woman is astonishingly rife, I find. Very curious! Very curious!" He seemed to address the wall. "Why, it's the beginning of them. Doesn't the husband take risks?"

"He chooses his own. He doesn't have business risks thrust upon him by his wife."

"Doesn't he? What about the risk of finding himself tied for life to an inefficient housekeeper? That's a bit of a business risk, isn't it? I've known more than one man let in for it."

"And you've felt so sorry for him!"

"No, not specially. You must run risks. When you've finished running risks you're dead, and you ought to be buried. If I was a wife I should enjoy running a risk with my husband. I swear I shouldn't want to shut myself up in a glass case with him out of all the draughts! Why, what are we all alive for?"

The idea of the fineness of running risks struck her as original. It challenged her courage, and she began to meditate.

"Yes," she murmured. "So you sleep at the office sometimes?"

"A certain elasticity in one's domestic arrangements." He waved a hand, seeming to pooh-pooh himself lightly. Then, quickly changing his mood, he bent and said good night, but not quite with the saccharine artificiality of his first visit—rather with honest, friendly sincerity, in which were mingled both thanks and appreciation. Hilda jumped up responsively. And, the clarinet-case under his left arm, and the fiddle-case in his left hand, leaving the right arm free, Ingpen departed.

She did not immediately go to bed. Now that Ingpen was gone she perceived that though she had really said little in opposition to Edwin's scheme, he had at once assumed that she was a strong opponent of it. Hence she must have shown her feelings far too openly at the first mention of the affair before anybody had left. This annoyed her. Also the immense injustice of nearly all Ingpen's argument grew upon

her moment by moment. She was conscious of a grudge against him, even while greatly liking him. But she swore that she would never show the grudge, and that he should never suspect it. To the end she would play a man's part in the man-to-man discussion. Moreover, her anger against Edwin had not decreased. Nevertheless, a sort of zest, perhaps an angry joy, filled her with novel and intoxicating sensations. Let the scheme of the new works go forward! Let it fail! Let it ruin them! She would stand in the breach. She would show the whole world that no ordeal could lower her head. She had had enough of being the odalisque and the queen, reclining on the soft couch of security. Her nostrils scented life on the wind. . . . Then she heard a door close upstairs, and began at last rapidly, as it were cruelly, to put out the lights.

## IX

The incubus and humiliations of a first-class bilious attack are not eternal. Edwin had not retired very long before the malignant phase of the terrible malady passed inevitably, by phenomena according with all clinical experience, into the next phase. And the patient, who from being chiefly a stomach, had now become chiefly a throbbing head, lay on his pillow exhausted but once more capable of objective thought.

His resentment against his wife on account of her gratuitous disbelief in his business faculty, and on account of her interference in a matter that did not concern her, flickered up into new flame. He was absolutely innocent. She was absolutely guilty; no excuse existed or could be invented for her rude and wounding attitude. He esteemed Tertius Ingpen, bachelor, the most fortunate of men. . . . Women—unjust, dishonourable, unintelligent, unscrupulous, giggling, pleasure-loving! Their appetite for pleasure was infantile and tigerish. He had noticed it growing in Hilda. Previous to marriage he had regarded Hilda as combining the best feminine with the best masculine qualities. In many ways she had exhibited the comforting straightforward characteristics of the male. But since marriage her mental resemblance to a man had diminished daily, and now she was the most feminine woman

he had ever met, in the unsatisfactory sense of the word. Women. . . . Still, the behaviour of Janet and Hilda during the musical evening had been rather heroic. Impossible to dismiss them as being exclusively of the giggling race! They had decided to play a part, and they had played it with impressive fortitude. . . . And the house of the Orgreaves—was it about to fall? He divined that it was about to fall. No death had so far occurred in the family, which had seemed to be immune through decades and for ever. He wondered what would have happened to the house of Orgreave in six months' time. . . . Then he went back into the dark origins of his bilious attack. . . . And then he was at inexcusable Hilda again.

At length he heard her on the landing.

She entered the bedroom, and quickly he shut his eyes. He felt unpleasantly through his eyelids that she had turned up the gas. Then she was close to him, and sat down on the edge of the bed. She asked him a question, calmly, as to occurrences since his retirement. He nodded an affirmative.

"Your forehead's all broken out," she said, moving away.

In a few moments he was aware of the delicious, soothing, heavenly application to his forehead of a handkerchief drenched in eau-de-Cologne and water. The compress descended upon his forehead with the infinite gentleness of an endearment and the sudden solace of a reprieve. He made faint, inarticulate noises.

The light was extinguished for his ease.

He murmured weakly:

"Are you undressed already?"

"No," she said quietly. "I can undress all right in the dark."

He opened his eyes, and could dimly see her moving darkly about, brushing her hair, casting garments. Then she came towards him, a vague whiteness against the gloom, and, bending, felt for his face, and kissed him. She kissed him with superb and passionate violence; she drew his life out of him, and poured in her own. The tremendous kiss seemed to prove that there is no difference between love and hate. It contained everything—surrender, defiance, anger, and tenderness.

Neither of them spoke. The kiss dominated and assuaged him. Its illogicalness overthrew him. He could never have kissed like that under such circumstances. It was a high and bold gesture. It expressed and transmitted confidence. She had explained nothing, justified nothing, made no charge, asked no forgiveness. She had just confronted him with one unarguable fact. And it was the only fact that mattered. His pessimism about marriage lifted. If his spirit was splendidly romantic enough to match hers, marriage remained a feasible state. And he threw away logic and the past, and in a magic vision saw that success in marriage was an affair of goodwill and the right tone. With the whole force of his heart he determined to succeed in marriage. And in the mighty resolve marriage presented itself to him as really rather easy after all.

## CHAPTER X

### THE ORGREAVE CALAMITY

#### I

ON the following Saturday afternoon—that is, six days later—Edwin had unusually been down to the shop after dinner, and he returned home about four o'clock. Ada, hearing his entrance, came into the hall and said :

“ Please, sir, missis is over at Miss Orgreave’s and will ye please go over ? ”

“ Where’s Master George ? ”

“ In missis’s own room, sir.”

“ All right.”

The ‘ mistress’s own room ’ was the new nomenclature adopted by the kitchen, doubtless under suggestion, for the breakfast-room or boudoir. Edwin opened the door and glanced in. George, apparently sketching, sat at his mother’s desk, with the light falling over his right shoulder.

He looked up quickly in self-excuse :

“ Mother said I could ! Mother said I could ! ”

For the theory of the special sanctity of the boudoir had mysteriously established itself in the house during the previous eight or ten days. George was well aware that even Edwin was not entitled to go in and out as he chose.

“ Keep calm, sonny,” said Edwin, teasing him.

With permissible and discreet curiosity he glanced from afar at the desk, its upper drawers and its pigeon-holes. Obviously it was very untidy. Its untidiness gave him sardonic pleasure, because Hilda was ever implying, or even stating, that she was a very tidy woman. He remembered that many years ago Janet had mentioned orderliness as a trait of the wonderful girl, Hilda Lessways. But he did not personally consider that she was tidy ; assuredly she by no means reached his standard of tidiness, which standard indeed she



now and then dismissed as old-maidish. Also, he was sardonically amused by the air of importance and busyness which she put on when using the desk and the room ; her household accounts, beheld at a distance, were his wicked joy. He saw a bluish envelope lying untidily on the floor between the desk and the fire-place, and he picked it up. It had been addressed to ' Mrs. George Cannon, 59, Preston Street, Brighton,' and readdressed in a woman's hand to ' Mrs. Clayhanger, Trafalgar Road, Bursley.' Whether the handwriting of the original address was masculine or feminine he could not decide. The envelope had probably contained only a bill or a circular. Nevertheless he felt at once inimically inquisitive towards the envelope. Without quite knowing it he was jealous of all Hilda's past life up to her marriage with him. After a moment, reflecting that she had made no mention of a letter, he dropped the envelope superciliously, and it floated to the ground.

" I'm going to Lane End House," he said.

" Can I come ? "

" No."

## II

The same overhanging spirit of a great event which had somehow justified him in being curt to the boy, rendered him self-conscious and furtive as he stood in the porch of the Orgreaves, waiting for the door to open. Along the drive that curved round the oval lawn under the high trees were wheel-marks still surviving from the previous day. The house also survived ; the curtains in all the windows, and the plants or the pieces of furniture between the curtains, were exactly as usual. Yet the solid building and its contents had the air of an illusion.

. A servant appeared.

. " Good afternoon, Selina."

He had probably never before called her by name, but to-day his self-consciousness impelled him to do unc customary things.

" Good afternoon, sir," said Selina, whose changeless attire ignored even the greatest events. And it was as if she had said :

" Ah, sir ! To what have we come ! "

She, too, was self-conscious and furtive.

Aloud she said :

“ Miss Orgreave and Mrs. Clayhanger are upstairs, sir. I'll tell Miss Orgreave.”

Coughing nervously, he went into the drawing-room, the large obscure room, crowded with old furniture and expensive new furniture, with books, knick-knacks, embroidery, and human history, in which he had first set eyes on Hilda. It was precisely the same as it had been a few days earlier ; absolutely nothing had been changed, and yet now it had the archæological and forlorn aspect of a museum.

He dreaded the appearance of Janet and Hilda. What could he say to Janet, or she to him ? But he was a little comforted by the fact that Hilda had left a message for him to join them.

On the previous Tuesday Osmond Orgreave had died, and within twenty-four hours Mrs. Orgreave was dead also. On the Friday they were buried together. To-day the blinds were up again ; the funereal horses with their artificially curved necks had already dragged other corpses to the cemetery ; the town existed as usual ; and the family of Orgreave was scattered once more. Marian, the eldest daughter, had not been able to come at all, because her husband was seriously ill. Alicia Hesketh, the youngest daughter, far away in her large house in Devonshire, had not been able to come at all, because she was hourly expecting her third child ; nor would Harry, her husband, leave her. Charlie, the doctor at Ealing, had only been able to run down for the funeral, because his partner having broken his leg the whole work of the practice was on his shoulders. And to-day Tom, the solicitor, was in his office exploring the financial side of his father's affairs ; Johnnie was in the office of Orgreave & Sons, busy with the professional side of his father's affairs ; Jimmie, who had made a sinister marriage, was nobody knew precisely where ; Tom's wife had done what she could and gone home ; Jimmie's wife had never appeared ; Elaine, Marian's child, was shopping at Hanbridge for Janet ; and Janet remained among her souvenirs. An epoch was finished, and the episode that concluded it, in its strange features and its swiftness, resembled a vast hallucination.

Certain funerals will obsess a whole town. And the funeral of Mr. and Mrs. Osmond Orgreave might have been expected to do so. Not only had their deaths been almost simultaneous, but they had been preceded by superficially similar symptoms, though the husband had died of pericarditis following renal disease, and the wife of hyperæmia of the lungs following increasingly frequent attacks of bronchial catarrh. The phenomena had been impressive, and rumour had heightened them. Also Osmond Orgreave for half a century had been an important and celebrated figure in the town ; architecturally a large portion of the new parts of it was his creation. Yet the funeral had not been one of the town's great feverish funerals. True, the children would have opposed anything spectacular ; but had municipal opinion decided against the children, they would have been compelled to yield. Again and again prominent men in the town had as it were bought their funeral processions in advance by the yard—processions in which their families, willing or not, were reduced to the rôle of stewards.

Tom and Janet, however, had ordained that nobody whatever beyond the family should be invited to the funeral, and there had been no sincere protest from outside.

The fact was that Osmond Orgreave had never related himself to the crowd. He was not a Freemason ; he had never been President of the Society for the Prosecution of Felons ; he had never held municipal office ; he had never pursued any object but the good of his family. He was a particularist. His charm was kept chiefly for his own home. And beneath the cordiality of his more general connections there had always been a subtle reservation—on both sides. He was admired for his cleverness and his distinction, liked where he chose to be liked, but never loved save by his own kin. Further, he had a name for being ' pretty sharp ' in business. Clients had had prolonged difficulties with him—Edwin himself among them. The town had made up its mind about Osmond Orgreave, and the verdict, as with most popular verdicts, was roughly just so far as it went, but unjust in its narrowness. The laudatory three-quarters of a column in the "Signal" and the briefer effusive notice in the new halfpenny morning paper, both reflected, for those with

perceptions delicate enough to understand, the popular verdict. And though Edwin hated long funerals and the hysteria of a public woe, he had nevertheless a sense of disappointment in the circumstances of the final disappearance of Osmond Orgreave.

The two women entered the room silently. Hilda looked fierce and protective. Janet Orgreave, pale and in black, seemed very thin. She did not speak. She gave a little nod of greeting.

Edwin, scarcely controlling his voice and his eyes, murmured :

“ Good afternoon.”

They would not shake hands ; the effort would have broken them. All remained standing, uncertainly. Edwin saw before him two girls aged by the accumulation of experience. Janet, though apparently healthy, with her smooth fair skin, was like an old woman in the shell of a young one. Her eyes were dulled, her glance plaintive, her carriage slack. The conscious wish to please had left her, together with her main excuse for being alive. She was over thirty-seven, and more and more during the last ten years she had lived for her parents. She alone among all the children had remained absolutely faithful to them. To them, and to nobody else, she had been essential—a fountain of vigour and brightness and kindness from which they drew. To see her in the familiar and historic room which she had humanized and illuminated with her very spirit, was heart-rending. In a day she had become unnecessary, and shrunk to the unneeded, undesired virgin which in truth she was. She knew it. Everybody knew it. All the waves of passionate sympathy which Hilda and Edwin in their different ways ardently directed towards her broke in vain upon that fact.

Edwin thought :

“ And only the other day she was keen on tennis ! ”

“ Edwin,” said Hilda, “ don’t you think she ought to come across to our place for a bit ? I’m sure it would be better for her not to sleep here.”

“ Most decidedly,” Edwin answered, only too glad to agree heartily with his wife.

“ But Johnnie ? ” Janet objected.

"Pooh! Surely he can stay at Tom's."

"And Elaine?"

"She can come with you. Heaps of room for two."

"I couldn't leave the servants all alone. I really couldn't. They wouldn't like it," Janet persisted. "Moreover, I've got to give them notice."

Edwin had to make the motion of swallowing.

"Well," said Hilda obstinately, "come along now for the evening, anyhow. We shall be by ourselves."

"Yes, you must," said Edwin curtly.

"I—I don't like walking down the street," Janet faltered, blushing.

"You needn't. You can get over the wall," said Edwin.

"Of course you can," Hilda concurred. "Just as you are now. I'll tell Selina."

She left the room with decision, and the next instant returned with a telegram in her hand.

"Open it, please. I can't," said Janet.

Hilda read:

"Mother and boy both doing splendidly.—HARRY."

Janet dropped on to a chair and burst into tears.

"I'm so glad. I'm so glad," she spluttered. "I can't help it."

Then she jumped up, wiped her eyes, and smiled.

For a few yards the Clayhanger and the Orgreave properties were contiguous, and separated by a fairly new wall, which, after much procrastination on the part of owners, had at last replaced an unsatisfactory thorn-hedge. While Selina put a chair in position for the ladies to stand on as a preliminary to climbing the wall, Edwin suddenly remembered that in the days of the untidy thorn-hedge Janet had climbed a pair of steps in order to surmount the hedge and visit his garden. He saw her balanced on the steps, and smiling and then jumping, like a child. Now, he preceded her and Hilda on to the wall, and they climbed carefully, and when they were all up Selina handed him the chair and he dropped it on his own side of the wall so that they might descend more easily.



"Be careful, Edwin. Be careful," cried Hilda, neither pleasantly nor unpleasantly.

And as he tried to read her mood in her voice, the mysterious and changeful ever-flowing undercurrent of their joint life bore rushing away his sense of Janet's tragedy ; and he knew that no events exterior to his marriage could ever overcome for long that constant secret preoccupation of his concerning Hilda's mood.

## III

When they came into the house, Ada met them with zest and calamity in her whispering voice :

"Please'm, Mr. and Mrs. Benbow are here. They're in the drawing-room. They said they'd wait a bit to see if you came back."

Ada had foreseen that, whatever their superficially indifferent demeanour as members of the powerful ruling caste, her master and mistress would be struck all of a heap by this piece of news. And they were. For the Benbows did not pay chance calls ; in the arrangement of their lives every act was neatly planned and foreordained. Therefore this call was formal, and behind it was an intention.

"I can't see them. I can't possibly, dear," Janet murmured, as it were intimidated. "I'll run back home."

Hilda replied with benevolent firmness :

"No, you won't. Come upstairs with me till they're gone. Edwin, you go and see what they're after."

Janet faltered and obeyed, and the two women crept swiftly upstairs. They might have been executing a strategic retirement from a bad smell. The instinctive movement, and the manner, were a judgment on the ideals of the Benbows so terrible and final that even the Benbows, could they have seen it, must have winced and doubted for a moment their own moral perfection. It came to this, that the stricken fled from their presence.

"'What they're after' !" Edwin muttered to himself, half-resenting the phrase ; because Clara was his sister ; and though she bored and exasperated him, he could not class her with exactly similar boring and exasperating women.

And, throwing down his cap, he went with false casual welcoming into the drawing-room.

Young Bert Benbow, prodigiously solemn and uncomfortable in his birthday spectacles, was with his father and mother. Immense satisfaction, tempered by a slight nervousness, gleamed in the eyes of the parents, and the demeanour of all three showed instantly that the occasion was ceremonious. Albert and Clara could not have been more pleased and uplifted had the occasion been a mourning visit of commiseration or even a funeral.

The washed and brushed schoolboy, preoccupied, did not take his share in the greetings with sufficient spontaneity and promptitude.

Clara said, gently shocked :

“ Bert, what do you say to your uncle ? ”

“ Good afternoon, uncle.”

“ I should think so indeed ! ”

Clara of course sprang at once to the luscious first topic, as to a fruit :

“ How is poor Janet bearing up ? ”

Edwin was very characteristically of the Five Towns in this—he hated to admit, in the crisis itself, that anything unusual was happening or had just happened. Thus he replied negligently :

“ Oh ! All right ! ”

As though his opinion was that Janet had nothing to bear up against.

“ I hear it was a *very* quiet funeral,” said Clara, suggesting somehow that there must be something sinister behind the quietness of the funeral.

“ Yes,” said Edwin.

“ Didn’t they ask *you* ? ”

“ No.”

“ Well—my word ! ”

There was a silence, save for faint humming from Albert, and then, just as Clara was mentioning her name, in rushed Hilda.

“ What’s the matter ? ” the impulsive Hilda demanded bluntly.

This gambit did not please Edwin, whose instinct was always to pretend that nothing was the matter. He would have maintained as long as anybody that the call was a chance call.

After a few vague exchanges, Clara coughed and said :

"It's really about your George and our Bert. . . . Haven't you heard ? . . . Hasn't George said anything ?"

"No. . . . What ?"

Clara looked at her husband expectantly, and Albert took the grand male rôle.

"I gather they had a fight yesterday at school," said he.

The two boys went to the same school, the new-fangled Higher Grade School at Hanbridge, which had dealt such a blow at the ancient educational foundations at Oldcastle. That their Bert should attend the same school as George was secretly a matter of pride to the Benbows.

"Oh," said Edwin. "We've seen no gaping wounds, have we, Hilda ?"

Albert's face did not relax.

"You've only got to look at Bert's chin," said Clara.

Bert shuffled under the world's sudden gaze. Undeniably there was a small discoloured lump on his chin.

"I've had it out with Bert," Albert continued severely.

"I don't know who was in the wrong—it was about that penknife business, you know—but I'm quite sure that Bert was not in the right. And as he's the older we've decided that he must ask George's forgiveness."

"Yes," eagerly added Clara, tired of listening. "Albert says we can't have quarrels going on like this in the family—they haven't spoken friendly to each other since that night we were here—and it's the manly thing for Bert to ask George's forgiveness, and then they can shake hands."

"That's what I say." Albert massively corroborated her.

Edwin thought :

"I suppose these people imagine they're doing something rather fine."

Whatever they imagined they were doing, they had made both Edwin and Hilda sheepish. Either of them would have sacrificed a vast fortune and the lives of thousands of Sunday-school officers in order to find a dignified way of ridiculing and crushing the expedition of Albert and Clara ; but they could think of naught that was effective.

Hilda asked, somewhat curtly, but lamely :

"Where is George ?"

"He was in your boudoir a two-three minutes ago, drawing," said Edwin.

Clara's neck was elongated at the sound of the word 'boudoir.'

"Boudoir?" said she. And Edwin could in fancy hear her going down Trafalgar Road and giggling at every house-door: "Did ye know Mrs. Clayhanger has a boudoir? That's the latest." Still he had employed the word with intention, out of deliberate bravado.

"Breakfast-room," he added, explanatory.

"I should suggest," said Albert, "that Bert goes to him in the breakfast-room. They'll settle it much better by themselves." He was very pleased by this last phrase, which proved him a man of the world after all.

"So long as they don't smash too much furniture while they're about it," murmured Edwin.

"Now, Bert, my boy," said Albert, in the tone of a father who is also a brother.

And, as Hilda was inactive, Bert stalked forth upon his mission of manliness, smiling awkwardly and blushing. He closed the door after him, and not one of the adults dared to rise and open it.

"Had any luck with missing words lately?" Albert asked, in a detached airy manner, showing that the Bert-George affair was a trifle to him, to be dismissed from the mind at will.

"No," said Edwin. "I've been off missing words lately."

"Of course you have," Clara agreed with gravity. "All this must have been very trying to you all. . . . Albert's done very well of course."

"I was on 'politeness,' my boy," said Albert.

"Didn't you know?" Clara expressed surprise.

"'Politeness'?"

"Sixty-four pounds nineteen shillings per share," said Albert tremendously.

Edwin appreciatively whistled.

"Had the money?"

"No. Cheques go out on Monday, I believe. Of course," he added, "I go in for it scientifically. I leave no chances, I don't. I'm making a capital outlay of over five pounds ten

on next week's competition, and I may tell you I shall get it back again, *with* interest."

At the same moment, Bert re-entered the room.

"He's not there," said Bert. "His drawing's there, but he isn't."

This news was adverse to the cause of manly peace.

"Are you sure?" asked Clara, implying that Bert might not have made a thorough search for George in the boudoir.

Hilda sat grim and silent.

"He may be upstairs," said the weakly amiable Edwin.

Hilda rang the bell with cold anger.

"Is Master George in the house?" she harshly questioned Ada.

"No'm. He went out a bit since."

The fact was that George, on hearing from the faithful Ada of the arrival of the Benbows, had retired through the kitchen and through the back-door, into the mountainous country towards Bleakridge railway-station, where kite-flying was practised on immense cinder-heaps.

"Ah! Well," said Albert, undefeated, to Edwin, "you might tell him Bert's been up specially to apologize to him. Oh, and here's that penknife!" He looked now at Hilda, and, producing Tertius Ingpen's knife, he put it with a flourish on the mantelpiece. "I prefer it to be on your mantelpiece than on ours," he added, smiling rather grandiosely. His manner as a whole, though compound, indicated with some clearness that while he adhered to his belief in the efficacy of prayer, he could not allow his son to accept from George earthly penknives alleged to have descended from heaven. It was a triumphant hour for Albert Benbow, as he stood there dominating the drawing-room. He perceived that, in addition to silencing and sneaping the elder and richer branch of the family, he was cutting a majestic figure in the eyes of his own son.

In an awful interval, Clara said with a sweet bright smile:

"By the way, Albert, don't forget about what Maggie asked you to ask."

"Oh, yes! By the way," said Albert, "Maggie wants to know how soon you can complete the purchase of this house of yours."



Edwin moved uneasily.

"I don't know," he mumbled.

"Can you stump up in a month? Say the end of October anyway, at latest." Albert persisted, and grew caustic.

"You've only got to sell a few of your famous securities."

"Certainly. Before the end of October," Hilda replied, with impulsive and fierce assurance.

Edwin was amazed by this interference on her part. Was she incapable of learning from experience? Let him employ the right tone with absolutely perfect skill, marriage would still be impossible if she meant to carry on in this way! What did she know about the difficulties of completing the purchase? What right had she to put in a word apparently so decisive? Such behaviour was unheard of. She must be mad. Nevertheless he did not yield to anger. He merely said feebly and querulously:

"That's all very well! That's all very well! But I'm not quite so sure as all that. Will she let some of it be on mortgage?"

"No, she won't," said Albert.

"Why not?"

"Because I've got a new security for the whole amount myself."

"Oh!"

Edwin glanced at his wife and his resentful eyes said: "There you are! All through your infernal hurry and cheek Maggie's going to lose eighteen hundred pounds in a rotten investment. I told you Albert would get hold of that money if he heard of it. And just look!"

At this point Albert, who knew fairly well how to draw an advantage from his brother-in-law's characteristic weaknesses, perceived suddenly the value of an immediate departure. And amid loud inquiries of all sorts from Clara, and magnificent generalities from Albert, and gloomy, stiff salutations from uncomfortable Bert, the visit closed.

But destiny lay in wait at the corner of the street for Albert Benbow's pride. Precisely as the Benbows were issuing from the portico, the front-door being already closed upon them, the second Swetnam son came swinging down Trafalgar Road. He stopped, raising his hat.

"Hello, Mr. Benbow," he said. "You've heard the news, I suppose?"

"What about?"

"Missing-word competitions."

It is a fact that Albert paled.

"What?"

"Injunction in the High Court this morning. All the money's impounded, pending a hearing as to whether the competitions are illegal or not. At the very least half of it will go in costs. It's all over with missing words."

"Who told you?"

"I've had a wire to stop me from sending in for next week's."

Albert Benbow gave an oath. His wife ought surely to have been horror-struck by the word; but she did not blench. Flushing and scowling she said:

"What a shame! We've sent ours in."

The faithful creature had for days past at odd moments been assisting her husband in the dictionary and as a clerk. . . . And lo! at last, confirmation of those absurd but persistent rumours to the effect that certain busybodies meant if they could to stop missing-word competitions on the ground that they were simply a crude appeal to the famous 'gambling instincts' of mankind and especially of Englishmen! Albert had rebutted the charge with virtuous warmth, insisting on the skill involved in word-choosing, and insisting also on the historical freedom of the institutions of his country. He maintained that it was inconceivable that any English court of justice should ever interfere with a pastime so innocent and so tonic for the tired brain. And though he had had secret fears, and had been disturbed and even hurt by the comments of a religious paper to which he subscribed, he would not waver from his courageous and sensible English attitude. Now the fearful blow had fallen, and Albert knew in his heart that it was Heaven's punishment for him. He turned to shut the gate after him, and noticed Bert. It appeared to him that in hearing the paternal oath, Bert had been guilty of a crime, or at least an indiscretion, and he at once began to make Bert suffer.

Meanwhile Swetnam had gone on, to spread the tale which

was to bring indignation and affliction into tens of thousands of respectable homes.

## IV

Janet came softly and timidly into the drawing-room.

"They are gone?" she questioned. "I thought I heard the front-door."

"Yes, thank goodness!" Hilda exclaimed candidly, disdaining the convention (which Edwin still had in respect) that a weakness in family ties should never be referred to, beyond the confines of the family, save in urbane terms of dignity and regret excusing so far as possible the sinner. But in this instance the immense ineptitude of the Benbows had so affected Edwin that, while objecting to his wife's outbreak, he could not help giving a guffaw which supported it. And all the time he kept thinking to himself:

"Imagine that d——d pietistic rascal dragging the miserable shrimp up here to apologize to George!"

He was ashamed, not merely of his relatives, but somehow of all humanity. He could scarcely look even a chair in the face. The Benbows had left behind them desolation, and this desolation affected everything, and could be tasted on the tongue. Janet of course instantly noticed it, and felt that she ought not to witness the shaming of her friends. Moreover, her existence now was chiefly an apology for itself.

She said:

"I really think I ought to go back and see about a meal for Johnnie in case he turns up."

"Nonsense!" said Hilda sharply. "With three servants in the house, I suppose Johnnie won't starve! Now just sit down. Sit *down*!" Her tone softened. "My dear, you're worse than a child. . . . Tell Edwin." She put a cushion behind Janet in the easy-chair. And the gesture made Janet's eyes humid once more.

Edwin had the exciting, disquieting, vitalizing sensation of being shut up in an atmosphere of women. Not two women, but two thousand, seemed to hem him in with their incalculable impulses, standards, inspirations.

"Janet wants to consult you," Hilda added; and even Hilda appeared to regard him as a strong saviour.

He thought :

"After all, then, I'm not the born idiot she'd like to make out. Now we're getting at her real opinion of me !"

"It's only about father's estate," said Janet.

"Why? Hasn't he made a will?"

"Oh, yes! He made a will over thirty years ago. He left everything to mother and made her sole executor or whatever you call it. Just like him, wasn't it? . . . D'you know that he and mother never had a quarrel, nor anything near a quarrel?"

"Well," Edwin, nodding appreciatively, answered with an informed masculine air. "The law provides for all that. Tom will know. Did your mother make a will?"

"No. Dear thing! She would never have dreamt of it."

"Then letters of administration will have to be taken out," said Edwin.

Janet began afresh :

"Father was talking of making a new will two or three months ago. He mentioned it to Tom. He said he should like you to be one of the executors. He said he would sooner have you for an executor than anybody."

An intense satisfaction permeated Edwin, that he should have been desired as an executor by such an important man as Osmond Orgreave. He felt as though he were receiving compensation for uncounted detractions.

"Really?" said he. "I expect Tom will take out letters of administration, or Tom and Johnnie together; they'll make better executors than I should."

"It doesn't seem to make much difference who looks after it and who doesn't," Hilda sharply interrupted, "when there's nothing to look after."

"Nothing to look after?" Edwin repeated.

"Nothing to look after!" said Hilda in a firm and clear tone. "According to what Janet says."

"But surely there must be something!"

Janet answered mildly :

"I'm afraid there isn't much."

It was Hilda who told the tale. The freehold of Lane End House belonged to the estate, but there were first and second mortgages on it, and had been for years. Debts had

always beleaguered the Orgreave family. A year ago money had apparently been fairly plentiful, but a great deal had been spent on refurnishing. Jimmie had had money, in connection with his sinister marriage; Charlie had had money in connection with his practice, and Tom had enticed Mr. Orgreave into the Palace Porcelain Company. Mr. Orgreave had given a guarantee to the bank for an overdraft, in exchange for debentures and shares in that company. The debentures were worthless, and therefore the shares also, and the bank had already given notice under the guarantee. There was an insurance policy—one poor little insurance policy for a thousand pounds—whose capital well invested might produce an income of twelve or fifteen shillings a week; but even that policy was lodged as security for an overdraft on one of Osmond's several private banking accounts. There were many debts, small to middling. The value of the Orgreave architectural connection was excessively dubious,—so much of it had depended upon Osmond Orgreave himself. The estate might prove barely solvent; on the other hand it might prove insolvent; so Johnnie, who had had it from Tom, had told Janet that day, and Janet had told Hilda.

"Your father was let in for the Palace Porcelain Company?" Edwin breathed, with incredulous emphasis on the initial P's. "What on earth was Tom thinking of?"

"That's what Johnnie wants to know," said Janet. "Johnnie was very angry. They've had some words about it."

Except for the matter of the Palace Porcelain Company, Edwin was not surprised at the revelations, though he tried to be. The more closely he examined his attitude for years past to the Orgreave household structure, the more clearly he had to admit that a suspicion of secret financial rottenness had never long been absent from his mind—not even at the period of renewed profuseness, a year or two ago, when furniture-dealers, painters, and paperhangers had been enriched. His resentment against the deceased charming Osmond and also against the affectionate and blandly confident mother, was keen and cold. They had existed, morally, on Janet for many years; monopolized her, absorbed her, aged her, worn her out, done everything but finish her,—and they



had made no provision for her survival. In addition to being useless, she was defenceless, helpless, penniless, and old ; and she shivered now that the warmth of her parents' affection was withdrawn by death.

"You see," said Janet. "Father was so transparently honest and generous."

Edwin said nothing to this sincere outburst.

"Have you got any money at all, Janet?" asked Hilda.

"There's a little household money, and by a miracle I've never spent the ten-pound note poor dad gave me on my last birthday."

"Well," said Edwin, sardonically imagining that ten-pound note as a sole defence for Janet against the world. "Of course Johnnie will have to allow you something out of the business—for one thing."

"I'm sure he will, if he can," Janet agreed. "But he says it's going to be rather tight. He wants us to clear out of the house at once."

"Take my advice and don't do it," said Edwin. "Until the house is let or sold it may as well be occupied by you as stand empty—better in fact, because you'll look after it."

"*That's* right enough, anyway," said Hilda, as if to imply that by a marvellous exception a man had for once in a while said something sensible.

"You needn't use all the house," Edwin proceeded. "You won't want all the servants."

"I wish you'd say a word to Johnnie," breathed Janet.

"I'll say a word to Johnnie, all right," Edwin answered loudly. "But it seems to me it's Tom that wants talking to. I can't imagine what he was doing to let your father in for that Palace Porcelain business. It beats me."

Janet quietly protested :

"I feel sure he thought it was all right."

"Oh, of course!" said Hilda bitterly. "Of course ! They always do think it's all right. And here's my husband just going into one of those big dangerous affairs, and *he* thinks it's all right, and nothing I can say will stop him from going into it. And he'll keep on thinking it's all right until it's all wrong and we're ruined, and perhaps me left a widow with George." Her lowered eyes blazed at the carpet.

Janet, troubled, glanced from one to the other, and then, with all the tremendous unconscious persuasive force of her victimhood and her mourning, murmured gently to Edwin :

“ Oh ! Don’t run any risks ! Don’t run any risks ! ”

Edwin was staggered by the swift turn of the conversation. Two thousand women hemmed him in more closely than ever. He could do nothing against them except exercise an obstinacy which might be esteemed as merely brutal. They were not accessible to argument—Hilda especially. Argument would be received as an outrage. It would be impossible to convince Hilda that she had taken a mean and disgraceful advantage of him, and that he had every right to resent her behaviour. She was righteousness and injuredness personified. She partook, in that moment, of the victimhood of Janet. And she baffled him.

He bit his lower lip.

“ All that’s not the business before the meeting,” he said as lightly as he could. “ D’you think if I stepped down now I should catch Johnnie at the office ? ”

And all the time, while his heart hardened against Hilda, he kept thinking :

“ Suppose I *did* come to smash ! ”

Janet had put a fear in his mind, Janet who in her wistfulness and her desolating ruin seemed to be like only a little pile of dust—all that remained of the magnificent social structure of a united and numerous Orgreave family.

v

Edwin met Tertius Ingpen in the centre of the town outside the offices of Orgreave & Sons, amid the commotion caused by the return of uplifted spectators from a football match in which the team curiously known to the sporting world as ‘ Bursley Moorthorne ’ had scored a broken leg and two goals to nil.

“ Hello ! ” Ingpen greeted him. “ I was thinking of looking in at your place to-night.”

“ Do ! ” said Edwin. “ Come up with me now.”

“ Can’t ! . . . Why do these ghastly louts try to walk over you as if they didn’t see you ? ” Then in another tone, very quietly, and nodding in the direction of the Orgreave

offices : " Been in there ? . . . What a week, eh ! . . . How are things ? "

" Bad," Edwin answered. " In a word, bad ! "

Ingpen lifted his eyebrows.

They turned away out of the crowd, up towards the tranquillity of the Turnhill Road. They were manifestly glad to see each other. Edwin had had a satisfactory interview with Johnnie Orgreave,—satisfactory in the sense that Johnnie had admitted the wisdom of all that Edwin said and promised to act on it.

" I've just been talking to young Johnnie for his own good," said Edwin.

And in a moment, with eagerness, with that strange, deep satisfaction felt by the carrier of disastrous tidings, he told Ingpen all that he knew of the plight of Janet Orgreave.

" If you ask me," said he, " I think it's infamous."

" Infamous," Ingpen repeated the word savagely. " There's no word for it. What'll she do ? "

" Well, I suppose she'll have to live with Johnnie."

" And where will Mrs. Chris come in, then ? " Ingpen asked in a murmur.

" Mrs. Chris Hamson ? " exclaimed Edwin, startled. " Oh ! Is that affair still on the carpet ? . . . Cheerful outlook ! "

Ingpen pulled his beard.

" Anyhow," said he, " Johnnie's the most reliable of the crew. Charlie's the most agreeable, but Johnnie's the most reliable. I wouldn't like to count much on Tom, and as for Jimmie, well, of course——! "

" I always look on Johnnie as a kid. Can't help it."

" There's no law against that, so long as you don't go and blab it out to Mrs. Chris," Ingpen laughed.

" I don't know her."

" You ought to know her. She's an education, my boy."

" I've been having a fair amount of education lately," said Edwin. " Only this afternoon I was practically told that I ought to give up the idea of my new works because it has risks and the Palace Porcelain Company was risky and Janet hasn't a cent. See the point ? "

He was obliged to talk about the affair, because it was heavily on his mind. A week earlier he had persuaded himself

that the success of a marriage depended chiefly on the tone employed to each other by the contracting parties. But in the disturbing scene of the afternoon, his tone had come near perfection, and yet marriage presented itself as even more stupendously difficult than ever. Ingpen's answering words salved and strengthened him. The sensation of being comprehended was delicious. Intimacy progressed.

"I say," said Edwin, as they parted. "You'd better not know anything about all this when you come to-night."

"Right you are, my boy."

Their friendship seemed once more to be suddenly and surprisingly intensified.

When Edwin returned, Janet had vanished again. Like an animal which fears the hunt and whose shyness nothing can cure, she had fled to cover at the first chance. According to Hilda she had run home because it had occurred to her that she must go through her mother's wardrobe and chest of drawers without a moment's delay.

Edwin's account to his wife of the interview with Johnnie Orgreave was given on a note justifiably triumphant. In brief he had 'talked sense' to Johnnie, and Johnnie had been convicted and convinced. Hilda listened with respectful propriety. Edwin said nothing as to his encounter with Tertius Ingpen, partly from prudence and partly from timidity. When Ingpen arrived at the house, much earlier than he might have been expected to arrive, Edwin was upstairs, and on descending he found his wife and his friend chatting in low and intimate voices close together in the drawing-room. The gas had been lighted.

"Here's Mr. Ingpen," said Hilda, announcing a surprise.

"How do, Ingpen?"

"How do, Ed?"

Ingpen did not rise. Nor did they shake hands, but in the Five Towns friends who have reached a certain degree of intimacy proudly omit the ceremony of handshaking when they meet. It was therefore impossible for Hilda to divine that Edwin and Tertius had previously met that day, and apparently Ingpen had not divulged the fact. Edwin felt like a plotter.

The conversation of course never went far away from the

subject of the Orgreaves—and Janet in particular. Ingpen's indignation at the negligence which had left Janet in the lurch was more than warm enough to satisfy Hilda, whose grievance against the wicked carelessness of heads of families in general seemed to be approaching expression again. At length she said :

"It's enough to make any woman think seriously of where *she'd* be—if anything happened."

Ingpen smiled teasingly.

"Now you're getting personal."

"And what if I am ? With my headstrong husband going in for all sorts of schemes !" Hilda's voice was extraordinarily clear and defiant.

Edwin nervously rose.

"I'll just get some cigarettes," he mumbled.

Hilda and Ingpen scarcely gave him any attention. Already they were exciting themselves. Although he knew that the supply of cigarettes was in the dining-room, he toured half the house before going there ; and then lit the gas and with strange deliberation drew the blinds ; next he rang the bell for matches, and, having obtained them, lit a cigarette.

When he re-entered the drawing-room, Ingpen was saying with terrific conviction :

"You're quite wrong, as I've told you before. It's your instinct that's wrong, not your head. Women will do anything to satisfy their instincts, simply anything. They'll ruin your life in order to satisfy their instincts. Yes, even when they know jolly well their instincts are wrong !"

Edwin thought :

"Well, if these two mean to have a row, it's no affair of mine."

But Hilda, seemingly overfaced, used a very moderate tone to retort :

"You're very outspoken."

Tertius Ingpen answered firmly :

"I'm only saying aloud what every man thinks. . . . Mind *every* man."

"And how comes it that *you* know so much about women ?"

"I'll tell you some time," said Ingpen shortly, and then smiled again.



Edwin, advancing, murmured :

“ Here. Have a cigarette.”

A few moments later Ingpen was sketching out a Beethoven symphony, unaided, on the piano, and holding his head back to keep the cigarette-smoke out of his eyes.

## VI

When the hour struck for which Hilda had promised a sandwich supper Edwin and Tertius Ingpen were alone in the drawing-room and Ingpen was again at the piano, apparently absorbed in harmonic inventions of his own. No further word had been said upon the subject of the discussion between Ingpen and Hilda. On the whole, despite the reserve of Hilda's demeanour, Edwin considered that marriage at the moment was fairly successful, and the stream of existence running in his favour. At five minutes after the hour, restless, he got up and said :

“ I'd better be seeing what's happened to that supper.”

Ingpen nodded, as in a dream.

Edwin glanced into the dining-room, where the complete supper was waiting in illuminated silence and solitude. Then he went to the boudoir. There, the two candlesticks from the mantelpiece had been put side by side on the desk, and the candles lit the figures of Hilda and her son. Hilda, kneeling, held a stamped and addressed letter in her hand, the boy was bent over the desk at his drawing, which his mother regarded. Edwin in his heart affectionately derided them for employing candles when the gas would have been so much more effective ; he thought that the use of candles was ‘ just like ’ one of Hilda's unforeseeable caprices. But in spite of his secret derision he was strangely affected by the group as revealed by the wavering candle-flames in the general darkness of the room. He seldom saw Hilda and George together ; neither of them was very expansive ; and certainly he had never seen Hilda kneeling by her son's side since a night at the Orgreaves' before her marriage, when George lay in bed unconscious and his spirit hesitated between earth and heaven. He knew that Hilda's love for George had in it something of the savage, but, lacking demonstrations of it, he had been apt to forget its importance in the phenomena

of their united existence. Kneeling by her son, Hilda had the look of a girl, and the ingenuousness of her posture touched Edwin. The idea shot through his brain like a star, that life was a marvellous thing.

As the door had been ajar, they scarcely heard him come in. George turned first.

And then Ada was standing at the door.

"Yes'm?"

"Oh! Ada! Just run across with this letter to the pillar, will you?"

"Yes'm."

"You've missed the post, you know," said Edwin.

Hilda got up slowly.

"It doesn't matter. Only I want it to be in the post."

As she gave the letter to Ada he speculated idly as to the address of the letter, and why she wanted it to be in the post. Anyhow, it was characteristic of her to want the thing to be in the post. She would delay writing a letter for days, and then, having written it, be 'on pins' until it was safely taken out of the house; and even when the messenger returned she would ask: "Did you put that letter in the post?"

Ada had gone.

"What's he drawing, this kid?" asked Edwin genially.

Nobody answered. Standing between his wife and the boy he looked at the paper. The first thing he noticed was some lettering, achieved in an imitation of architect's lettering: "*Plan for proposed new printing-works to be erected by Edwin Clayhanger, Esq., upon land at Shawport. George Edwin Clayhanger, Architect.*" And on other parts of the paper, 'Ground-floor plan' and 'Elevation.' The plan at a distance resembled the work of a real architect. Only when closely examined did it reveal itself as a piece of boyish mimicry. The elevation was not finished. . . . It was upon this that, with intervals caused by the necessity of escaping from bores, George had been labouring all day. And here was exposed the secret and the result of his chumminess with Johnnie Orgreave. Yet the boy had never said a word to Edwin in explanation of that chumminess; nor had Johnnie himself.

"He's been telling me he's going to be an architect," said Hilda.

“ Is this plan a copy of Johnnie’s, or is it his own scheme ? ” asked Edwin.

“ Oh, his own ! ” Hilda answered, with a rapidity and an earnestness which disclosed all her concealed pride in the boy.

Edwin was thrilled. He pored over the plan, making remarks and putting queries, in a dull matter-of-fact tone ; but he was so thrilled that he scarcely knew what he was saying or understood the replies to his questions. It seemed to him wondrous, miraculous, overwhelming, that his own disappointed ambition to be an architect should have re-flowered in his wife’s child who was not his child. He was reconciled to being a printer, and indeed rather liked being a printer, but now all his career presented itself to him as a martyrization. And he passionately swore that such a martyrization should not happen to George. George’s ambition should be nourished and forwarded as no boyish ambition had ever been nourished and forwarded before. For a moment he had a genuine conviction that George must be a genius.

Hilda, behind the back of proud, silent George, pulled Edwin’s face to hers and kissed it. And as she kissed she gazed at Edwin and her eyes seemed to be saying : “ Have your works ; I have yielded. Perhaps it is George’s plan that has made me yield, but anyhow I am strong enough to yield. And my strength remains.”

And Edwin thought : “ This woman is unique. What other woman could have done that in just that way ? ” And in their embrace, intensifying and complicating its significance, were mingled the sensations of their passion, his triumph, her surrender, the mysterious boy’s promise, and their grief for Janet’s tragedy.

“ Old Ingpen’s waiting for his supper, you know,” said Edwin tenderly. “ George, you must show that to Mr. Ingpen.”

## BOOK II

### THE PAST

#### CHAPTER XI

#### LITHOGRAPHY

##### I

EDWIN, sitting behind a glazed door with the word 'Private' elaborately patterned on the glass, heard through the open window of his own office the voices of the Benbow children and their mother in the street outside.

"Oh, mother! What a big sign!"

"Yes. Isn't Uncle Edwin a proud man to have such a big sign?"

"Hsh!"

"It wasn't up yesterday."

"L, i, t, h, o,——"

"My word, Rupy! You are getting on!"

"They're such large letters, aren't they, mother? . . .

'Lithographic' . . . 'Lithographic printing. Edwin Clayhanger.'"

"Hsh! . . . Bert, how often do you want me to tell you about your shoe-lace?"

"I wonder if George has come."

"Mother, can't *I* ring the bell?"

All the children were there, with their screeching voices. Edwin wondered that Rupert should have been brought. Where was the sense of showing a three-year-old infant like Rupert over a printing-works? But Clara was always like that. The difficulty of leaving little Rupert alone at home did not present itself to the august uncle.

Edwin rose, locked a safe that was let into the wall of the room, and dropped the key into his pocket. The fact

of the safe being let into the wall gave him as much simple pleasure as any detail of the new works ; it was an idea of Johnnie Orgreave's. He put a grey hat carelessly at the back of his head, and, hands in pockets, walked into the next and larger room, which was the clerks' office.

Both these rooms had walls distempered in a green tint, and were fitted and desked in pitch-pine. Their newness was stark, and yet in the clerks' office the irrational habituating processes of time were already at work. On the painted iron mantelpiece lay a dusty white tile, brought as a sample long before the room was finished, and now without the slightest excuse for survival. Nevertheless the perfunctory cleaner lifted the tile on most mornings and dusted underneath it, and replaced it ; and Edwin and his staff saw it scores of times daily and never challenged it, and gradually it was acquiring a prescriptive right to exist just where it did. And the day was distant when some inconvenient, reforming person would exclaim :

“ What's this old tile doing here ? ”

What Edwin did notice was that the walls and desks showed marks and even wounds ; it seemed to him somehow wrong that the brand-new could not remain for ever brand-new. He thought he would give a mild reproof of warning to the elder clerk (once the shop-clerk in the ancient establishment at the corner of Duck Bank and Wedgwood Street), and then he thought : “ What's the use ? ” and only murmured :

“ I'm not going off the works.”

And he passed out, with his still somewhat gawky gait, to the small entrance-hall of the works. On the outer face of the door, which he closed, was painted the word ‘ Office.’ He had meant to have the words ‘ Counting-House ’ painted on that door, because they were romantic and fine-sounding ; but when the moment came to give the order he had quaked before such romance ; he was afraid as usual of being sentimental and of ‘ showing off,’ and with assumed satire had publicly said : “ Some chaps would stick ‘ Counting-House ’ as large as life all across the door.” He now regretted his poltroonery. And he regretted sundry other failures in courage connected with the scheme of the works. The works



existed, but it looked rather like other new buildings, and not very much like the edifice he had dreamed. It ought to have been grander, more complete, more dashing, expensive, more of an exemplar to the slattern district. He had been (he felt) unduly influenced by the local spirit for half-measures. And his life seemed to be a life of half-measures, a continual falling-short. Once he used to read studiously on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday evenings. He seldom read now, and never with regularity. Scarcely a year ago he had formed a beautiful, vague project of being 'musical.' At Hilda's instigation he had bought a book of musical criticism by Hubert Parry, and Hilda had swallowed it in three days, but he had begun it and not finished it. And the musical evenings, after feeble efforts to invigorate them, had fainted and then died on the miserable excuse that circumstances were not entirely favourable to them. And his marriage, so marvellous in its romance during the first days . . . !

Then either his common sense or his self-respect curtly silenced these weak depreciations. He had wanted the woman and he had won her,—he had taken her. There she was, living in his house, bearing his name, spending his money ! The world could not get over that fact, and the carper in Edwin's secret soul could not get over it either. He had said that he would have a new works, and, with all its faults and little cowardices, there the new works was ! And, moreover, it had just been assessed for municipal rates at a monstrous figure. He had bought his house (and mortgaged it) ; he had been stoical to bad debts ; he had sold securities—at rather less than they cost him ; he had braved his redoubtable wife ; and he had got his works ! His will, and naught else, was the magic wand that had conjured it into existence.

The black and gold sign that surmounted its blue roofs could be seen from the top of Acre Lane and half-way along Shawport Lane, proclaiming the progress of lithography and steam-printing, and the name of Edwin Clayhanger. Let the borough put that in its pipe and smoke it ! He was well aware that the borough felt pride in his works. And he had orders more than sufficient to keep the enterprise hand-

somely going. Even in the Five Towns initiative seemed to receive its reward.

Life might be as profoundly unsatisfactory as you please, but there was zest in it.

The bell had rung. He opened the main door, and there stood Clara and her brood. And Edwin was the magnificent, wonderful uncle. The children entered, with maternal precautions and recommendations. Every child was clean and spruce; Bert clumsy, Clara minx-like, Amy heavy and benignant, Lucy the pretty little thing, and Rupert simply adorable—each representing a separate and considerable effort of watchful care. The mother came last, worn, still pretty, with a slight dragging movement of the limbs. In her glittering keen eyes were both envy and naïve admiration of her brother. “What a life!” thought Edwin, meaning what a narrow, stuffy, struggling, conventional, unlovely existence was the Benbows’! He and they lived in different worlds of intelligence. Nevertheless he savoured the surpassing charm of Rupert, the goodness of Amy, the floral elegance of Lucy, and he could appreciate the unending labours of that mother of theirs, malicious though she was. He was bluff and jolly with all of them. The new works being fairly close to the Benbow home, the family had often come *en masse* to witness its gradual mounting, regarding the excursions as a sort of picnic. And now that the imposing place was inaugurated and the signs up, Uncle Edwin had been asked to show them over it in a grand formal visit, and he had amiably consented.

“Has George come, Uncle Edwin?” asked Bert.

George had not come. A reconciliation had occurred between the cousins (though by no means at the time nor in the manner desired by Albert); they were indeed understood by the Benbows to be on the most touching terms of intimacy, which was very satisfactory to the righteousness of Albert and Clara; and George was to have been of the afternoon party; but he had not arrived. Edwin, knowing the unknowableness of George, suspected trouble.

“Machines! Machines!” piped tiny white-frosted Rupert, to whom wondrous tales had been told.

“You’ll see machines all right,” said Edwin promisingly

It was not his intention to proceed straight to the machine-room. He would never have admitted it, but his deliberate intention was to display the works dramatically, with the machine-room as a culmination. The truth was, the man was full of secret tricks, contradicting avuncular superior indifference. He was a mere boy—he was almost a schoolgirl.

He led them through a longish passage, and up steps and down steps—steps which were not yet hallowed, but which would be hallowed—into the stone-polishing shop, which was romantically obscure, with a specially dark corner where a little contraption was revolving all by itself in the process of smoothing a stone. Young Clara stared at the two workmen, while the rest stared at the contraption, and Edwin, feeling ridiculously like a lecturer, mumbled words of exposition. And then next, after climbing some steps, they were in a lofty apartment with a glass roof, sunshine-drenched and tropical. Here lived two more men, including Karl the German, bent in perspiration over desks, and laboriously drawing. Round about were coloured designs, and stones covered with pencilling and boards, and all sorts of sheets of paper and cardboard.

“Ooh!” murmured Bert, much impressed by the meticulous cross-hatching of Karl’s pencil on a stone.

And Edwin said:

“This is the drawing-office.”

“Oh, yes!” murmured Clara vaguely. “It’s very warm, isn’t it?”

None of them except Bert was interested. They gazed about dully, uncomprehendingly, absolutely incurious.

“Machines!” Rupert urged again.

“Come on, then,” said Edwin, going out with assumed briskness and gaiety.

At the door stood Tertius Ingpen, preoccupied and alert, with all the mien of a factory inspector in full activity.

“Don’t mind me,” said Ingpen, “I can look after myself. In fact, I prefer to.”

At the sight of an important stranger speaking familiarly to Uncle Edwin, all the children save Rupert grew stiff, dismal, and apprehensive, and Clara looked about as though she had suddenly discovered very interesting phenomena in the corners of the workshop.

"My sister, Mrs. Benbow—Mr. Ingpen. Mr. Ingpen is Her Majesty's Inspector of Factories, so we must mind what we're about," said Edwin.

Clara gave a bright, quick smile as she limply shook hands. The sinister enchantment which precedes social introduction was broken. And Clara, overcome by the extraordinary chivalry and deference of Ingpen's customary greeting to women, decided that he was a particularly polite man; but she reserved her general judgment on him, having several times heard Albert inveigh against the autocratic unreasonableness of this very inspector, who, according to Albert, forgot that even an employer had to live, and that that which handicapped the employer could not possibly help the workman—"in the long run."

"Machines!" Rupert insisted.

They all laughed; the other children laughed suddenly and imitatively, and an instant later than the elders; and Tertius Ingpen, as he grasped the full purport of the remark, laughed more than anyone. He turned sideways and bent slightly in order to give vent to his laughter, which, at first noiseless and imprisoned, gradually grew loud in freedom. When he had recovered, he said thoughtfully, stroking his soft beard:

"Now it would be very interesting to know exactly what that child understands by 'machines'—what his mental picture of them is. Very interesting! Has he ever seen any?"

"No," said Clara.

"Ah! That makes it all the more interesting." Ingpen added roguishly: "I suppose you think you *do* know, Mrs. Benbow?"

Clara smiled the self-protective, non-committal smile of one who is not certain of having seen the point.

"It's very hot in here, Edwin," she said, glancing at the door. The family filed out, shepherded by Edwin.

"I'll be back in a sec.," said he to Clara, on the stairs, and returned to the drawing-office.

Ingpen was in apparently close conversation with Karl.

"Yes," murmured Ingpen, thoughtfully tapping his teeth.

"The whole process is practically a contest between grease and water on the stone."

"Yes," said Karl gruffly, but with respect.

And Edwin could almost see the tentacles of Ingpen's mind feeling and tightening round a new subject of knowledge, and greedily possessing it. What a contrast to the vacuous indifference of Clara, who was so narrowed by specialization that she could never apply her brain to anything except the welfare and the aggrandizement of her family! He dwelt sardonically upon the terrible results of family life on the individual, and dreamed of splendid freedoms.

"Mr. Clayhanger," said Ingpen, in his official manner, turning.

The two withdrew to the door. Invisible, at the foot of the stairs, could be heard the family, existing.

"Haven't seen much of lithography, eh?" said Edwin, in a voice discreetly restrained.

Ingpen, ignoring the question, murmured:

"I say, you know, this place is much too hot."

"Well," said Edwin. "What do you expect in August?"

"But what's the object of all that glass roof?"

"I wanted to give 'em plenty of light. At the old shop they hadn't enough, and Karl, the Teuton there, was always grumbling."

"Why didn't you have some ventilation in the roof?"

"We did think of it. But Johnnie Orgreave said if we did we should never be able to keep it watertight."

"It certainly isn't right as it is," said Ingpen, "and our experience is that these skylighted rooms that are too hot in summer are too cold in winter. How should you like to have your private office in here?"

"Oh!" protested Edwin. "It isn't so bad as all that."

Ingpen said quietly:

"I should suggest you think it over—I mean the ventilation."

"But you don't mean to say that this shop here doesn't comply with your confounded rules?"

Ingpen answered:

"That may or may not be. But we're entitled to make recommendations in any case, and I should like you to think this over, if you don't mind. I haven't any thermometer with me, but I lay it's ninety degrees here, if not more." In



Ingpen's urbane, reasonable tone there was just a hint of the potential might of the whole organized kingdom.

"All serene," said Edwin, rather ashamed of the temperature after all, and loyally responsive to Ingpen's evident sense of duty, which somehow surprised him; he had not chanced, before, to meet Ingpen at work; earthenware manufactories were inspected once a quarter, but other factories only once a year. The thought of the ameliorating influence that Ingpen must obviously be exerting all day and every day somewhat clashed with and upset his bitter scepticism concerning the real value of departmental administrative government,—a scepticism based less upon experience than upon the persuasive tirades of democratic apostles.

They walked slowly towards the stairs, and Ingpen scribbled in a notebook.

"You seem to take your job seriously," said Edwin, teasing.

"While I'm at it. Did you imagine that I'd dropped into a sinecure? Considering that I have to keep an eye on three hundred and fifty potbanks, over a thousand other factories, and over two thousand workshops of sorts, my boy . . . ! *And* you should see some of 'em. *And* you should listen to the excuses."

"No wonder," thought Edwin, "he hasn't told me what a fine and large factory mine is! . . . Still, he might have said something, all the same. Perhaps he will."

When, after visiting the composing-room, and glancing from afar at the engine-house, the sightseeing party reached the machine-room, Rupert was so affected by the tremendous din and the confusing whirl of huge machinery in motion that he began to cry, and, seizing his mother's hand, pressed himself hard against her skirt. The realization of his ambition had overwhelmed him. Amy protectingly took Lucy's hand. Bert and Clara succeeded in being very casual.

In the great lofty room there were five large or fairly large machines, and a number of small ones. The latter had chiefly to do with envelope and billhead printing and with book-binding, and only two of them were in use. Of the large machines, three were functioning—the cylinder printing-machine which had been the pride of Edwin's father; the

historic 'old machine,' also his father's, which had been so called ever since Edwin could remember and which was ageless, and Edwin's latest and most expensive purchase, the 'Smithers' litho-printer. It was on the guarded flank of the 'Smithers,' close to the roller-racks, that Edwin halted his convoy. The rest of the immense shop with its complex masses of metal revolving, sliding, or paralysed, its shabby figures of men, boys, and girls shifting mysteriously about, its smell of iron, grease, and humanity, and its fearful racket, was a mere background for the Smithers in its moving might.

The Smithers rose high above the spectators, and at one end of it, higher even than the top parts of the machine, was perched a dirty, frowzy, pretty girl. With a sweeping gesture of her bare arms this girl took a wide sheet of blank paper from a pile of sheets, and lodged it on the receiving rack, whereupon it was whirled off, caught into the clutches of the machine, turned, reversed, hidden away from sight among revolving rollers red and black, and finally thrust out at the other end of the machine, where it was picked up by a dirty, frowzy girl, not pretty, smaller and younger than the high-perched creature, indeed scarcely bigger than Amy. And now on the sheet was printed four times in red the words: 'Knype Mineral Water Mnfg. Co. Best and cheapest. Trade-mark.' Clara screeched a question about the trade-mark, which was so far invisible. Edwin made a sign to the lower dirty, frowzy girl, who respectfully but with extreme rapidity handed him a sheet as it came off the machine, and he shouted through the roar in explanation that the trade-mark, a soda-water syphon in blue, would be printed on the same sheet later from another stone, and the sheets cut into fours, each quarter making a complete poster. "I thought it must be like that," replied Clara superiorly. From childhood she had been well accustomed to printing processes, and it was not her intention to be perplexed by 'this lithography.' Edwin made a gesture to hand back the sheet to the machine-girl, but the machine would not pause to allow her to take it. She was the slave of the machine; so long as it functioned, every second of her existence was monopolized, and no variation of conduct permissible. The same law applied to the older girl up near the ceiling. He put the sheet in its

place himself, and noticed that to do so required appreciable care and application of the manipulative faculty.

These girls, and the other girls at their greasy task in the great shaking interior which he had created, vaguely worried him. Exactly similar girls were employed in thousands on the potbanks, and had once been employed also at the pit-heads and even in the pits ; but until lately he had not employed girls, nor had his father ever employed girls ; and these girls so close to him, so dependent on him, so submissive, so subjugated, so soiled, so vulgar, whose wages would scarcely have kept his wife in boots and gloves, gave rise to strange and disturbing sensations in his heart—not merely in regard to themselves, but in regard to the whole of the workpeople. A question obscure and lancinating struck upwards through his industrial triumph and through his importance in the world, a question scarcely articulate, but which seemed to form itself into the words : Is it right ?

“ Is what right ? ” his father would have snapped at him. “ Is what right ? ” would have respectfully demanded Big James, who had now sidled grandiosely to the Smithers, and was fussing among the rollers in the rack. Neither of them would have been capable of comprehending his trouble. To his father an employee was an employee, to be hired, as cheaply as possible, and to be exploited as completely as possible. And the attitude of Big James towards the underlings was precisely that of his deceased master. They would not be unduly harsh, they would often be benevolent, but the existence of any problem, and especially any fundamental problem, beyond the direct inter-relation of wages and work could not conceivably have occurred to them. After about three-quarters of a century of taboo trade-unions had now for a dozen years ceased to be regarded as associations of anarchistic criminals. Big James was cautiously in favour of trade-unions, and old Darius Clayhanger in late life had not been a quite uncompromising opponent of them. As for Edwin, he had always in secret sympathized with them, and the trade-unionists whom he employed had no grievance against him. Yet this unanswerable, persistent question would pierce the complacency of Edwin’s prosperity. It seemed to operate in a sort of fourth dimension ; few even

amongst trade-unionists themselves would have reacted to it. But Edwin lived with it more and more. He was indeed getting used to it. Though he could not answer it, he could parry it, thanks to scientific ideas obtained from Darwin and Spencer, by the reflection that both he and his serfs, whatever their sex, were the almost blind agencies of a vast process of evolution. And this he did, exulting with pride sometimes in the sheer adventure of the affair, and sharing his thoughts with none. . . . Strange that once, and not so many years ago either, he had been tempted to sell the business and live inert and ignobly secure on the interest of invested moneys ! But even to-day he felt sudden fears of responsibility ; they came and went.

The visitors, having wandered to and fro, staring, trailed out of the machine-room, led by Edwin. A wide door swung behind them, and they were in the abrupt, startling peace of another corridor. Clara wiped Rupert's eyes, and he smiled, like a blossom after a storm. The mother and the uncle exchanged awkward glances. They had nothing whatever to say to each other. Edwin could seldom think of anything that he really wanted to say to Clara. The children were very hot and weary of wonders.

"Well," said Clara, "I suppose we'd better be moving on now." She had somewhat the air of a draught-animal about to resume the immense labour of dragging a train. "It's very queer about George. He was to have come with us for tea."

"Oh ! Was he ?"

"Of course he was," Clara replied sharply. "It was most distinctly arranged."

At this moment Tertius Ingpen and Hilda appeared together at the other end of the corridor. Hilda's unsmiling face seemed enigmatic. Ingpen was talking with vivacity.

Edwin thought apprehensively :

"What's up now ? What's she doing here, and not George ?"

And when the sisters-in-law, so strangely contrasting, shook hands, he thought :

"Is it possible that Albert looks on his wife as something unpredictable ? Do those two also have moods and alterca-

tions, and antagonisms? Are they always preoccupied about what they are thinking of each other? No! It's impossible. Their life must be simply fiendishly monotonous." And Clara's inferiority before the erect, flashing individuality of Hilda appeared to him despicable. Hilda bent and kissed Rupert, Lucy, Amy, and young Clara, as it were with passion. She was marvellous as she bent over Rupert. She scarcely looked at Edwin. Ingpen stood aside.

"I'm very sorry," said Hilda perfunctorily. "I had to send George on an errand to Hanbridge at the last moment."

Nothing more! No genuine sign of regret! Edwin blamed her severely. 'Send George on an errand to Hanbridge'! That was Hilda all over! Why the devil should she go out of her way to make unpleasantness with Clara? She knew quite well what kind of a woman Clara was, and that the whole of Clara's existence was made up of domestic trifles, each of which was enormous for her.

"Will he be down to tea?" asked Clara.

"I doubt it."

"Well . . . another day, then."

Clara, gathering her offspring, took leave at a door in the corridor which gave on to the yard. Mindful to the last of Mr. Ingpen's presence (which Hilda apparently now ignored), she smiled sweetly as she went. But behind the smile, Edwin with regret, and Hilda with satisfaction, could perceive her everlasting grudge against their superior splendour. Even had they sunk to indigence Clara could never have forgiven Edwin for having towards the end of their father's life prevented Albert from wheedling a thousand pounds out of old Darius, nor Hilda for her occasional pricking, unanswerable sarcasms. . . . Still, Rupert, descending two titanic steps into the yard, clung to his mother as to an angel.

"And *what* errand to Hanbridge?" Edwin asked himself mistrustfully.

## II

Scarcely a minute later, when Edwin, with Hilda and Ingpen, was back at the door of the machine-room, the office-boy could be seen voyaging between roaring machines across the room towards his employer. The office-boy made



a sign of appeal, and Edwin answered with a curt sign that the office-boy was to wait.

"What's that ye say?" Edwin yelled in Ingpen's ear.

Ingpen laughed, and made a trumpet with his hands:

"I was only wondering what your weekly running expenses are."

Even Ingpen was surprised and impressed by the scene, and Edwin was pleased now, after the flatness of Clara's inspection, that he had specially arranged for two of the machines to be running which strictly need not have been running that afternoon. He had planned a spectacular effect, and it had found a good public.

"Ah!" He hesitated, in reply to Ingpen. Then he saw Hilda's face, and his face showed confusion and he smiled awkwardly.

Hilda had caught Ingpen's question. She said nothing. Her expressive, sarcastic, unappeasable features seemed to say: "Running expenses! Don't mention them. Can't you see they must be enormous? How can he possibly make this place pay? It's a gigantic folly—and what will be the end of it?"

After all, her secret attitude towards the new enterprise was unchanged. Arguments, facts, figures, persuasions, brutalities had been equally and totally ineffective. And Edwin thought:

"She is the bitterest enemy I have."

Said Ingpen:

"I like that girl up there on the top of that machine. And doesn't she just know where she is! What a movement of the arms, eh?"

Edwin nodded, appreciative, and then beckoned to the office-boy.

"What is it?"

"Please, sir, Mrs. 'Amps in the office to see you."

"All right," he bawled, casually. But in reality he was taken back. "It's Auntie Hamps now!" he said to the other two. "We shall soon have all Bursley here this afternoon."

Hilda raised her eyebrows.

"D'you know 'Auntie Hamps'?" she grimly asked

Ingpen. Her voice, though she scarcely raised it, was plainer than the men's when they shouted. As Ingpen shook his head, she added: "You ought to."

Edwin did not altogether care for this public ridicule of a member of the family. Auntie Hamps, though possibly a monster, had her qualities. Hilda, assuming the lead, beckoned with a lift of the head. And Edwin did not care for that either, on his works. Ingpen followed Hilda as though to a menagerie.

Auntie Hamps, in her black attire, which by virtue of its changeless style amounted to a historic uniform, was magnificent in the private office. The three found her standing in wait, tingling with vitality and importance and eagerness. She watched carefully that Edwin shut the door, and kept her eye not only on the door but also on the open window. She received the presentation of Mr. Tertius Ingpen with grandeur and with high cordiality, and she could appreciate even better than Clara the polished fealty of his greeting.

"Sit down, Auntie."

"No, I won't sit down. I thought Clara was here. I told her I might come if I could spare a moment. I must say, Edwin"—she looked around the small office, and seemed to be looking round the whole works in a superb glance—"you make me proud of you. You make me proud to be your auntie."

"Well," said Edwin, "you can be proud sitting down."

She smiled. "No, I won't sit down. I only just popped in to catch Clara. I was going to tea with her and the chicks." Then she lowered her voice: "I suppose you've heard about Mr. John Orgreave?" Her tone proved, however, that she supposed nothing of the kind.

"No. What about Johnnie?"

"He's run away with Mrs. Chris Hamson."

Her triumph was complete. It was perhaps one of her last triumphs, but it counted among the greatest of her career as a watchdog of society.

The thing was a major event, and the report was convincing. Useless to protest 'Never!' 'Surely not!' 'It can't be true!' It carried truth on its face. Useless to demand sternly: 'Who told you?' The news had reached

Auntie Hamps through a curious channel—the stationmaster at Latchett. Heaven alone could say how Auntie Hamps came to have relations with the stationmaster at Latchett. But you might be sure that, if an elopement was to take place from Latchett station, Auntie Hamps would by an instinctive prescience have had relations with the stationmaster for twenty years previously. Latchett was the next station, without the least importance, to Shawport on the line to Crewe. Johnnie Orgreave had got into the train at Shawport, and Mrs. Chris had joined it at Latchett, her house being near by. Once on the vast platforms of Crewe, the guilty couple would be safe from curiosity, lost in England, like needles in a haystack.

The Orgreave-Hamson flirtation had been afoot for over two years, but had only been seriously talked about for less than a year. Mrs. Chris did not 'move' much in town circles. She was older than Johnnie, but she was one of your blonde, slim, unfruitful women, who under the shade of a suitable hat-brim are ageless. Mr. Chris was a heavy man, 'glumpy' as they say down there, a moneymaker in pots, and great on the colonial markets. He made journeys to America and to Australia. His Australian journey occupied usually about four months. He was now on his way back from Sydney, and nearly home. Mrs. Chris had not long since inherited a moderate fortune. It must have been the fortune, rendering them independent, that had decided the tragic immoralists to abandon all for love. The time of the abandonment was fixed for them by circumstance, for it had to occur before the husband's return.

Imagine the Orgreave business left in the hands of an incompetent irresponsible like Jimmie Orgreave! And then, what of that martyr, Janet? Janet and Johnnie had been keeping house together—a tiny house. And Janet had had to 'have an operation.' Women, talking together, said exactly what the operation was, but the knowledge was not common. The phrase 'have an operation' was enough in its dread. As a fact the operation, for calculus, was not very serious; it had perfectly succeeded, and Janet, whom Hilda had tenderly visited, was to emerge from the nursing home at Knype Vale within three days. Could not Johnnie and

his Mrs. Chris have waited until she was re-established ? No, for the husband was unpreventably approaching, and romantic love must not be balked. Nothing could or should withstand romantic love. Janet had not even been duly warned ; Hilda had seen her that very morning, and assuredly she knew nothing then. Perhaps Johnnie would write to her softly from some gay seaside resort where he and his leman were hiding their strong passion. The episode was shocking ; it was ruinous. The pair could never return. Even Johnnie alone would never dare to return.

“ He was a friend of yours, was he not ? ” asked Auntie Hamps in bland sorrow of Tertius Ingpen.

He was a friend, and a close friend, of all three of them. And not only had he outraged their feelings—he had shamed them, irretrievably lowered their prestige. They could not look Auntie Hamps in the face. But Auntie Hamps could look them in the face. And her glance, charged with grief and with satisfaction, said : “ How are the mighty fallen, with their jaunty parade of irreligion, and their musical evenings on Sundays, with the windows open while folks are coming home from chapel ! ” And there could be no retort.

“ Another good man ruined by women ! ” observed Tertius Ingpen, with a sigh, stroking his beard.

Hilda sprang up ; and all her passionate sympathy for Janet, and her disappointment and disgust with Johnnie, the victim of desire, and her dissatisfaction with her husband and her hatred of Auntie Hamps, blazed forth and devastated the unwise Ingpen as she scathingly replied :

“ Mr. Ingpen, that is a caddish thing to say ! ”

She despised convention ; she was frankly and atrociously rude ; and she did not care. Edwin blushed. Tertius Ingpen blushed.

“ I’m sorry,” said Ingpen, keeping his temper. “ I think I ought to have left a little earlier. Good-bye, Ed. Mrs. Hamps——” He bowed with extreme urbanity to the ladies, and departed.

Shortly afterwards Auntie Hamps also departed, saying that she must not be late for tea at dear Clara’s. She was secretly panting to disclose the whole situation to dear Clara. What a scene had Clara missed by leaving the works too soon!

## CHAPTER XII

### DARTMOOR

#### I

“**W**HAT was that telegram you had this afternoon, Hilda ? ”

The question was on Edwin's tongue as he walked up Acre Lane from the works by his wife's side. But it did not achieve utterance. A year had passed since he last walked up Acre Lane with Hilda ; and now of course he recalled the anger of that previous promenade. In the interval he had acquired to some extent the habit of containing his curiosity and his criticism. In the interval he had triumphed, but Hilda also had consolidated her position, so that despite the increase of his prestige she was still his equal ; she seemed to take strength from him in order to maintain the struggle against him.

During the final half-hour at the works the great, the enormous problem in his mind had been—not whether such and such a plan of action for Janet's welfare in a very grave crisis would be advisable, but whether he should demand an explanation from Hilda of certain disquieting phenomena in her boudoir. In the excitement of his indecision Janet's tragic case scarcely affected his sensibility. For about twelve months Hilda had, he knew, been intermittently carrying on a correspondence as to which she had said no word to him ; she did not precisely conceal it, but she failed to display it. Lately, so far as his observation went, it had ceased. And then to-day he had caught sight of an orange telegraph-envelope in her waste-paper basket. Alone in the boudoir, and glancing back cautiously and guiltily at the door, he had picked up the little ball of paper and smoothed it out, and read the words : ‘ Mrs. Edwin Clayhanger.’ In those days the wives of even prominent business men did not



customarily receive such a rain of telegrams that the delivery of a telegram would pass unmentioned and be forgotten. On the contrary, the delivery of a telegram was an event in a woman's life. The telegram which he had detected might have been innocently negligible, in forty different ways. It might, for example, have been from Janet, or about a rehearsal of the Choral Society, or from a tradesman at Oldcastle, or about rooms at the seaside. But supposing that it was not innocently negligible? Supposing that she was keeping a secret? . . . What secret? What conceivable secret? He could conceive no secret. Yes, he could conceive a secret. He had conceived and did conceive a secret, and his private thoughts elaborated it. . . .

He had said to himself at the works : " I may ask her as we go home. I shall see." But, out in the street, with the disturbing sense of her existence over his shoulder, he knew that he should not ask her. Partly timidity and partly pride kept him from asking. He knew that, as a wise husband, he ought to ask. He knew that common sense was not her strongest quality, and that by diffidence he might be inviting unguessed future trouble ; but he would not ask. In the great, passionate war of marriage they would draw thus apart, defensive and watchful, rushing together at intervals either to fight or to kiss. The heat of their kisses had not cooled ; but to him at any rate the kisses often seemed intensely illogical ; for, though he regarded himself as an improving expert in the science of life, he had not yet begun to preceive that those kisses were the only true logic of their joint career.

He was conscious of grievances against her as they walked up Acre Lane, but instead of being angrily resentful, he was content judicially to register the grievances as further corroboration of his estimate of her character. They were walking up Acre Lane solely because Hilda was Hilda. A year ago they had walked up Acre Lane in order that Edwin might call at the shop. But Acre Lane was by no means on the shortest way from Shawport to Bleakridge. Hilda, however, on emerging from the works, full of trouble concerning Janet, had suddenly had the beautiful idea of buying some fish for tea. In earlier days he would have said : " How accidental you are ! What would have happened to our tea if you

hadn't been down here, or if you hadn't by chance thought of fish ? " He would have tried to show her that her activities were not based in the principles of reason, and that even the composition of meals ought not to depend upon the hazard of an impulse. Now, wiser, he said not a word. He resigned himself in silence to an extra three-quarters of a mile of walking. In such matters, where her deep instinctiveness came into play, she had established over him a definite ascendancy.

Then another grievance was that she had sent George to Hanbridge, knowing that George, according to a solemn family engagement, ought to have been at the works. She was conscienceless. A third grievance, naturally, was her behaviour to Ingpen. And a fourth came back again to George. Why had she sent George to Hanbridge at all ? Was it not to dispatch a telegram which she was afraid to submit to the inquisitiveness of the Post Office at Bursley ? A daring supposition, but plausible ; and if correct, of what duplicity was she not guilty ! The mad, shameful episode of Johnnie Orgreave, the awful dilemma of Janet—colossal affairs though they were—interested him less and less as he grew more and more preoccupied with his relations to Hilda. And he thought, not caring :

"Something terrific will occur between us, one of these days."

And then his bravado would turn to panic.

## II

They passed along Wedgwood Street, and Hilda preceded him into the chief poulterer-and-fishmonger's. Here was another slight grievance of Edwin's ; for the chief poulterer-and-fishmonger's happened now to be the Clayhanger shop at the corner of Wedgwood Street and Duck Bank. Positively there had been competitors for the old location ! Why should Hilda go there and drag him there ? Could she not comprehend that he had a certain fine delicacy about entering ? . . . The place where the former sign had been was plainly visible on the brickwork above the shop-front. Rabbits, fowl, and a few brace of grouse hung in the right-hand window, from which most of the glass had been removed ; and in the left, upon newly-embedded slabs of Sicilian marble,

lay amid ice the curved forms of many fish, and behind them was the fat white-sleeved figure of the chief poulterer-and-fishmonger's wife with her great, wet hands. He was sad. He seriously thought yet again : " Things are not what they were in this town, somehow." For this place had once been a printer's ; and he had a conviction that printing was an aristocrat among trades. Indeed, could printing and fish-mongering be compared ?

The saleswoman greeted them with deference, calling Edwin ' sir,' and yet with a certain complacent familiarity, as an occupant to ex-occupants. Edwin casually gave the short shake of the head which in the district may signify ' Good day,' and turned, humming, to look at the hanging game. It seemed to him that he could only keep his dignity as a man of the world by looking at the grouse with a connoisseur's eye. Why didn't Hilda buy grouse ? The shop was a poor little interior. It smelt ill. He wondered what the upper rooms were like, and what had happened to the decrepit building at the end of the yard. The saleswoman slapped the fish about on the marble, and running water could be heard.

" Edwin," said Hilda, with enchanting sweetness and simplicity, " would you like hake or turbot, dear ? "

Impossible to divine from her voice that the ruin of their two favourite Orgreaves was complete, that she was conducting a secret correspondence, and that she had knowingly and deliberately offended her husband !

Both women waited, moveless, for the decision, as for an august decree.

When the transaction was finished, the saleswoman handed over the parcel into Hilda's gloved hands ; it was a rough-and-ready parcel, not at all like the neat stiff paper-bag of the modern age.

" Very hot, isn't it, ma'am ? " said the saleswoman.

And Hilda, utterly distinguished in gesture and tone, replied with calm, impartial urbanity :

" Very. Good afternoon."

" I'd better take that thing," said Edwin outside, in spite of himself.

She gave up the parcel to him.

"Tell cook to fry it," said Hilda. "She always fries better than she boils."

He repeated:

"'Tell cook to fry it.' What's up now?" His tone challenged.

"I must go over and see Janet at once. I shall take the next car."

He lifted the end of his nose in disgust. There was no end to the girl's caprices.

'Why at once?' the superior male demanded. Disdain and resentment were in his voice. Hundreds of times, when alone, he had decided that he would never use that voice—first, because it was unworthy of a philosopher; second, because it never achieved any good result; and third, because it often did harm. Yet he would use it. The voice had an existence and a volition of its own within his being; he marvelled that the essential mechanism of life should be so clumsy and inefficient. He heard the voice come out, and yet was not displeased, was indeed rather pleasantly excited. A new grievance had been created for him; he might have ignored it, just as he might ignore a solitary cigarette lying in his cigarette-case. Both cigarettes and grievances were bad for him. But he could not ignore them. The last cigarette in the case magnetized him. Useless to argue with himself that he had already smoked more than enough,—the cigarette had to emerge from the case and be burnt; and the grievance too was irresistible. In an instant he had it between his teeth and was darkly enjoying it. Of course Hilda's passionate pity for Janet was a fine thing. Granted! But therein was no reason why she should let it run away with her. The worst of these capricious, impulsive creatures was that they could never do anything fine without an enormous fuss and upset. What possible difference would it make whether Hilda went to break the news of disaster to Janet at once or in an hour's time? The mere desire to protect and assuage could not properly furnish an excuse for unnecessarily dislocating a household and depriving oneself of food. On the contrary, it was wiser and more truly kind to take one's meals regularly in a crisis. But Hilda would never appreciate that profound truth—never, never!

Moreover, it was certain that Johnnie had written to Janet.

"I feel I must go at once," said Hilda.

He spoke with more marked scorn :

"And what about your tea ?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter about my tea."

"Of course it matters about your tea. If you have your tea quietly, you'll find the end of the world won't have come, and you can go and see Janet just the same, and the whole house won't have been turned upside down."

She put her lips together and smiled mysteriously, saying nothing. The racket of the Hanbridge and Knype steam-car could be heard behind them. She did not turn her head. The car overtook them, and then stopped a few yards in front. But she did not hail the conductor. The car went onwards.

He had won. His argument had been so convincing that she could not help being convinced. It was too powerful for even her obstinacy, which as a rule successfully defied any argument whatever.

Did he smile and forgive ? Did he extend to her the blessing of his benevolence ? No. He could not have brought himself to such a point. After all, she had done nothing to earn approval ; she had simply refrained from foolishness. She had had to be reminded of considerations which ought ever to have been present in her brain. Doubtless she thought that he was hard, that he was incapable of her divine pity for Janet. But that was only because she could not imagine a combination of emotional generosity and calm common sense ; and she never would be able to imagine it. Hence she would always be unjust to him.

When they arrived home, she was still smiling mysteriously to herself. She did not take her hat off—sign of disturbance ! He moved with careful tranquillity through the ritual that preceded tea. He could feel her in the house, ordering it, softening it, civilizing it. He could smell the fish. He could detect the subservience of Ada to her mistress's serious mood. He went into the dining-room. Ada followed him with a tray of hot things. Hilda followed Ada. Then George entered, cleaner than ordinary. Edwin savoured deeply the functioning of his home. And his wife had yielded. Her



instinct had compelled her not to neglect him ; his sagacity had mastered her. In her heart she must admire his sagacity, whatever she said or looked, and her unreasoning passion for him was still the paramount force in her vitality.

"Now, are you two all right?" said Hilda, when she had poured out the tea and Edwin was carving the fish.

Edwin glanced up.

"I don't want any tea," she said. "I couldn't touch it."

She bent and kissed George, took her gloves from the sideboard, and left the house, the mysterious smile still on her face.

### III

Edwin controlled his vexation at this dramatic move. It was only slight, and he had to play the serene omniscient to George. Further, the attractive food helped to make him bland.

"Didn't you know your mother had to go out?" said Edwin, with astounding guile.

"Yes, she told me upstairs," George murmured, "while she was washing me. She said she had to go and see Auntie Janet again."

The reply was a blow to Edwin. She had said nothing to him, but she had told the boy. Still, his complacency was not upset. Boy and stepfather began to talk, with the mingled freedom and constraint practised by males accustomed to the presence of a woman, when the woman is absent. Each was aware of the stress of a novel, mysterious, and grave situation. Each also thought of the woman, and each knew that the other was thinking of the woman. Each, over a serious apprehension, seemed to be lightly saying: "It's rather fun to be without her for a bit. But we must be able to rely on her return." Nothing stood between them and domestic discomfort. Possible stupidity in the kitchen had no check. As regards the mere household machine, they had a ridiculous and amusing sense of distant danger.

Edwin had to get up in order to pour out more tea. He reckoned that he could both make tea and pour it out with more exactitude than his wife, who often forgot to put the milk in first. But he could not pour it out with the same

grace. His brain, not his heart, poured the tea out. He left the tray in disorder. The symmetry of the table was soon wrecked.

"Glad you're going back to school, I suppose?" said Edwin satirically.

George nodded. He was drinking, and he glanced at Edwin over the rim of the cup. He had grown much in twelve months, and was more than twelve months older. Edwin was puzzled by the almost sudden developments of his intelligence. Sometimes the boy was just like a young man; his voice had become a little uncertain. He still showed the greatest contempt for his finger-nails, but he had truly discovered the tooth-brush, and was preaching it at school among a population that scoffed yet was impressed.

"No. I'm glad," he answered.

"Oh! You're glad, are you?"

"Well, I'm glad in a way. A boy does have to go to school, doesn't he, uncle? And the sooner it's over the better. I tell you what I should like—I should like to go to school night and day and have no holidays till it was all done. I sh'd think you could save at least three years with that."

"A bit hard on the masters, wouldn't it be?"

"I never thought of that. Of course it would *never* be over for them. I expect they'd gradually die."

"Then you don't like school?"

George shook his head.

"Did you like school, uncle?"

Edwin shook his head. They both laughed.

"Uncle, can I leave school when I'm sixteen?"

"I've told you once."

"Yes, I know. But did you mean it? People change so."

"I told you you could leave school when you're sixteen if you pass the London Matric."

"But what good's the London Matric. to an architect? Mr. Orgreave says it isn't any good, anyway."

"When did he tell you that?"

"Yesterday."

"But not so long since you were all for being a stock-breeder!"

"Ah! I was only pretending to myself!" George smiled.

"Well, fetch me my cigarettes off the mantelpiece in the drawing-room."

The boy ran off, eager to serve, and Edwin's glance followed him with affection. George's desire to be an architect had consistently strengthened, save during a brief period when the Show of the North Staffordshire Agricultural Society, held with much splendour at Hanbridge, had put another idea into his noddle—an idea that fed itself richly on glorious bulls and other prize cattle for about a week, and then expired. Indeed, already it had been in a kind of way arranged that the youth should ultimately be articulated to Johnnie Orgreave. Among many consequences of Johnnie's defiance to society would probably be the quashing of that arrangement. And there was Johnnie, on the eve of his elopement, chatting to George about the futility of the London Matriculation! Edwin wondered how George would gradually learn what had happened to his friend and inspirer, John Orgreave.

He arrived with the cigarettes and offered them, and lit the match, and offered that.

"And what have you been doing with yourself all afternoon?" Edwin inquired between puffs of smoke.

"Oh, nothing much!"

"I thought you were coming to the works, and then going down to Auntie Clara's for tea?"

"So I was. But mother sent me to Hanbridge."

"Oh!" murmured Edwin casually. "So your mother packed you off to Hanbridge, did she?"

"I had to go to the Post Office," George continued. "I think it was a telegram, but it was in an envelope, and some money."

"Indeed!" said Edwin, with a very indifferent air.

He was, however, so affected that he jumped up abruptly from the table, and went into the darkening, chill garden, ignoring George. George, accustomed to these sudden accessions of interest and these sudden forgettings, went unperturbed his ways.

About half-past eight Hilda returned. Edwin was closing the curtains in the drawing-room. The gas had been lighted.

"Johnnie has evidently written to Alicia," she burst out

somewhat breathless. "Because Alicia's telegraphed to Janet that she must positively go straight down there and stay with them when she leaves the Home."

"What, on Dartmoor?" Edwin muttered, in a strange voice. The very word 'Dartmoor' made him shake.

"It isn't actually on the moor," said Hilda. "And so I shall take her down myself. I've told her all about things. She wasn't a bit surprised. They're a strange lot."

She tried to speak quite naturally, but he knew that she was not succeeding. Their eyes would not meet. Edwin thought :

"How far away we are from this morning!" Hazard and fate, like converging armies, seemed to be closing upon him.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE DEPARTURE

#### I

IT was a wet morning. Hilda, already in full street attire, save for her gloves, and with a half-empty cup of tea by her side, sat at the desk in the boudoir. She unlocked the large central drawer immediately below the flap of the desk, with a peculiar, quick, ruthless gesture, which gesture produced a very short snappy click that summed up all the tension spreading from Hilda's mind throughout the house and even into the town. It had been decided that, in order to call for Janet at the Nursing Home and catch the Crewe train at Knype for the Bristol and south-west of England connection, Hilda must leave the house at five minutes to nine.

This great fact was paramount in the minds of various people besides Hilda. Ada upstairs stood bent and flushed over a huge portmanteau into which she was putting the last things, while George hindered her by simultaneously tying to the leather handle a wet label finely directed by himself in architectural characters. The cook in the kitchen was preparing the master's nine o'clock breakfast with new solitudes caused by a serious sense of responsibility; for Hilda, having informed her in moving tones that the master's welfare in the mistress's absence would depend finally on herself, had solemnly entrusted that welfare to her—had almost passed it to her from hand to hand, with precautions, like a jewel in a casket. Ada, it may be said, had immediately felt the weight of the cook's increased importance. Edwin and the clerks at the works knew that Edwin had to be home for breakfast at a quarter to nine instead of nine, and that he must not be late, as Mrs. Clayhanger had a train to catch, and accordingly the morning's routine of the office was modified. And, finally, a short old man in a rainy stable-yard



in Acre Parade, between Acre Lane and Oldcastle Street, struggling to force a collar over the head of a cab-horse that towered above his own head, was already blasphemously excited by those pessimistic apprehensions about the flight of time which forty years of train-catching had never sufficed to allay in him. As for Janet, she alone in her weakness and her submissiveness was calm ; the nurse and Hilda understood one another, and she was " leaving it all " to them.

Hilda opened the drawer, half lifting the flap of the desk to disclose its contents. It was full of odd papers, letters, bills, blotting-paper, door-knobs, finger-plates, envelopes, and a small book or two. A prejudiced observer, such as Edwin, might have said that the drawer was extremely untidy. But to Hilda, who had herself put in each item separately, and each for a separate reason, the drawer was not untidy, for her intelligence knew the plan of it, and every item as it caught her eye suggested a justifying reason, and a good one. Nevertheless, she formed an intention to ' tidy out ' the drawer (the only drawer in the desk with a safe lock), upon her return home. She felt at the back of the drawer, drew forth the drawer a little farther, and felt again, vainly. A doubt of her own essential orderliness crossed her mind. " Surely I can't have put those letters anywhere else ? Surely I've not mislaid them ? " Then she closed the flap of the desk, and pulled the drawer right out, letting it rest on her knees. Yes, the packet was there, hidden, and so was another packet of letters—in the handwriting of Edwin. She was reassured. She knew she was tidy, had always been tidy. And Edwin's innuendoes to the contrary were inexcusable. Jerking the drawer irregularly back by force into its place, she locked it, reopened the desk, laid the packet on the writing-pad, and took a telegram from her purse to add to the letters in the packet.

The letters were all in the same loose, sloping hand, and on the same tinted note-paper. The signature was plain on one of them, ' Charlotte M. Cannon,' and then after it, in brackets, ' (Canonges), '—the latter being the real name of George Cannon's French father, and George Cannon's only legal name. The topmost letter began : " Dear Madam, I think it is my duty to inform you that my husband still

declares his innocence of the crime for which he is now in prison. He requests that you shall be informed of this. I ought perhaps to tell you that, since the change in my religious convictions, my feelings——” The first page ended there. Hilda turned the letters over, preoccupied, gazing at them and deciphering chance phrases here and there. The first letter was dated about a year earlier ; it constituted the beginning of the resuscitation of just that part of her life which she had thought to be definitely interred in memory.

Hilda had only once—and on a legal occasion—met Mrs. Canonges (as with strict correctness she called herself in brackets)—a surprisingly old lady, with quite white hair, and she had thought : “ What a shame for that erotic old woman to have bought and married a man so much younger than herself ! No wonder he ran away from her ! ” She had been positively shocked by the spectacle of the well-dressed, well-behaved, quiet-voiced, prim, decrepit creature with her aristocratic voice. And her knowledge of the possibilities of human nature was thenceforth enlarged. And when George Cannon (known to the law only as Canonges) had received two years’ hard labour for going through a ceremony of marriage with herself, she had esteemed, despite all her resentment against him, that his chief sin lay in his real first marriage, not in his false second one, and that for that sin the old woman was the more deserving of punishment. And when the old woman had with strange *naïveté* written to say that she had become a convert to Roman Catholicism and that her marriage and her imprisoned bigamous husband were henceforth to her sacred, Hilda had reflected sardonically : “ Of course it is always that sort of woman that turns to religion, when she’s too old for anything else ! ” And when the news came that her deceiver had got ten years’ penal servitude (and might have got penal servitude for life) for uttering a forged Bank of England note, Hilda had reflected in the same strain : “ Of course, a man who would behave as George behaved to me would be just the man to go about forging bank-notes ! I am not in the least astonished. What an inconceivable simpleton I was ! ”

A very long time had elapsed before the letter arrived bearing the rumour of Cannon’s innocence. It had not im-

mediately produced much effect on her mind. She had said not a word to Edwin. The idea of reviving the shames of that early episode in conversation with Edwin was extremely repugnant to her. She would not do it. She had not the right to do it. All her proud independence forbade her to do it. The episode did not concern Edwin. The effect on her of the rumour came gradually. It was increased when Mrs. Cannon wrote of evidence, a petition to the Home Secretary, and employing a lawyer. Mrs. Cannon's attitude seemed to say to Hilda : " You and I have shared this man. We alone in all the world." Mrs. Cannon seemed to imagine that Hilda would be interested. She was right. Hilda was interested. Her implacability relented. Her vindictiveness forgave. She pondered with almost intolerable compassion upon the vision of George Cannon suffering unjustly month after long month interminably the horrors of a convict's existence. She read with morbidity the reports of assizes, and picked up from papers and books and from Mrs. Cannon pieces of information about prisons. When he was transferred to Parkhurst in the Isle of Wight on account of ill-health, she was glad, because she knew that Parkhurst was less awful than Portland ; and when from Parkhurst he was sent to Dartmoor she tried to hope that the bracing air would do him good. She no longer thought of him as a criminal at all, but simply as one victim of his passion for herself ; she, Hilda, had been the other victim. She raged in secret against the British judicature, its delays, its stoniness, its stupidity. And when the principal witness in support of Cannon's petition died, she raged against fate. The movement for Cannon's release slackened for months. Of late it had been resumed, and with hopefulness. One of Cannon's companions had emerged from confinement (due to an unconnected crime), and was ready to swear affidavits.

Lastly Mrs. Cannon had written stating that she was almost beggared, and suggesting that Hilda should lend her ten pounds towards the expenses of the affair. Hilda had not ten pounds. That very day Hilda, seeing Janet in the Nursing Home, had demanded : " I say, Jan, I suppose you haven't got ten pounds you can let me have for about a day or so ? " and had laughed self-consciously. Janet, flushing

with eager pleasure, had replied : " Of course ! I've still got that ten-pound note the poor old dad gave me. I've always kept it in case the worst should happen." Janet was far too affectionate to display curiosity. Hilda had posted the bank-note late at night. The next day had come a telegram : " Telegraph if you are sending money." Not for a great deal would Hilda have dispatched through the hands of the old postmaster at Bursley—who had once been postmaster at Turnhill and known her parents—a telegram such as hers addressed to anybody named ' Cannon.' The fear of chatter and scandal was irrational, but it was a very genuine fear. She had sent her faithful George with the telegram to Hanbridge,—it was just as easy.

Hilda now, after hesitation, put the packet of letters in her handbag, to take with her. It was a precaution of secrecy which she admitted to be unnecessary, for she was quite certain that Edwin never looked into her drawers ; much less would he try to open a locked drawer ; his incurious confidence in her was in some respects almost touching. Certainly nobody else would invade the drawer. Still, she hid the letters in her handbag. Then, in her fashion, she scribbled a bold-charactered note to Mrs. Cannon, giving a temporary address, and this also she put in the handbag.

Her attitude to Mrs. Cannon, like her attitude to the bigamist, had slowly changed, and she thought of the old woman now with respect and sympathetic sorrow. Mrs. Cannon, before she knew that Hilda was married to Edwin, had addressed her first letter to Hilda ' Mrs. Cannon,' when she would have been justified in addressing it ' Miss Lessways.' In the days of her boarding-house it had been impossible, owing to business reasons, for Hilda to drop the name to which she was not entitled and to revert to her own. The authentic Mrs. Cannon, despite the violence of her grievances, had respected Hilda's difficulty ; the act showed kindly forbearance and it had aroused Hilda's imaginative gratitude. Further, Mrs. Cannon's pertinacity in the liberation proceedings, and her calm, logical acceptance of all the frightful consequences of being the legal wife of a convict, had little by little impressed Hilda, who had said to herself : " There is something in this old woman." And Hilda nowadays never

thought of her as an old woman who had been perverse and shameless in desire, but as a victim of passion like George Cannon. She said to herself: "This old woman still loves George Cannon; her love was the secret of her rancour against him, and it is also the secret of her compassion." These constant reflections, by their magnanimity, and their insistence upon the tremendous reality of love, did something to ennoble the clandestine and demoralizing life of the soul which for a year Hilda had hidden from her husband and from everybody.

## II

It still wanted twenty minutes to nine o'clock. She was too soon. The night before, Edwin had abraded her sore nerves by warning her not to be late—in a tone that implied habitual lateness on her part. Hilda was convinced that she was an exact woman. She might be late—a little late—six times together, but as there was a sound explanation of and excuse for each shortcoming, her essential exactitude remained always unimpaired in her own mind. But Edwin would not see this. He told her now and then that she belonged to that large class of people who have the illusion that a clock stands still at the last moment while last things are being done. She resented the observation, as she resented many of Edwin's assumptions concerning her. Edwin seemed to forget that she had been one of the first women-stenographers in England; that she had been a journalist-secretary and accustomed to correct the negligences of men of business, and, finally, that she had been in business by herself for a number of years. "Edwin would sweep all that away, and treat her like one of your mere brainless butterflies. At any rate, on the present occasion she was not late. And she took pride, instead of shame, in her exaggerated earliness. She had the air of having performed a remarkable feat.

She left the boudoir to go upstairs and superintend Ada, though she had told the impressed Ada that she should put full trust in her, and should not superintend her. However, as she opened the door she heard the sounds of Ada and George directing each other in the joint enterprise of bringing a very large and unwieldy portmanteau out of the bedroom. The



hour for superintendence was therefore past. Hilda went into the drawing-room idly, nervously, to wait till the port-manteau should have reached the hall. The French window was ajar, and a wet wind entered from the garden. The garden was full of rain. Two workmen were in it, employed by the new inhabitants of the home of the Orgreaves. Those upstarts had decided that certain branches of the famous Orgreave elms were dangerous and must be cut, and the workmen, shirt-sleeved in the rain, were staying one of the elms with a rope made fast to the swing in the Clayhanger garden. Hilda was unreasonably but sincerely antipathetic to her new neighbours. The white-ended stumps of great elm branches made her feel sick. Useless to insist to her on the notorious treachery of elms! She had an affection for those elms, and, to her, amputation was an outrage. The upstarts had committed other sacrilege upon the house and grounds, not heeding that the abode had been rendered holy by the sacraments of fate. Hilda stared and stared at the rain. And the prospect of the long, jolting, acutely depressing drive through the mud and the rain to Knype Vale, and of the interminable train journey with a tragic convalescent, braced her.

“Mother!”

George stood behind her.

“Well, have you got the luggage down?” She frowned, but George knew her nervous frown and could rightly interpret it. He nodded.

“Ought I to put ‘Dartmoor’ on the luggage label?”

She gave a negative sign.

Why should he ask such a question? She had never breathed the name of Dartmoor. Why should he mention it? Edwin also had mentioned Dartmoor. “What, on Dartmoor?” Edwin had said. Did Edwin suspect her correspondence? No. Had he suspected, he would have spoken. She knew him. And even if Edwin had suspected, George could not conceivably have had suspicions of any sort. . . . There he stood, the son of a convict, with no name of his own. He existed—because she and the convict had been unable to keep apart; his ignorance of the past was appalling to think of, the dangers incident to it dreadful; his easy confidence before the world affected her almost intolerably.

She felt that she could never atone to him for having borne him.

A faint noise at the front-door reached the drawing-room.

"Here's Nunks!" exclaimed George, and ran off eagerly.

This was his new name for his stepfather.

Hilda returned quickly to the boudoir. As she disappeared therein, she heard George descanting to Edwin on the beauties of his luggage label, and Edwin rubbing his feet on the mat and removing his mackintosh.

She came back to the door of the boudoir.

"Edwin."

"Hello!"

"One moment."

He came into the boudoir, wiping the rain off his face.

"Shut the door, will you?"

Her earnest, self-conscious tone stirred into activity the dormant, secret antagonisms that seemed ever to lie between them. She saw them animating his eyes, stiffening his pose.

Pointing to the cup and saucer on the desk, Edwin said critically:

"That all you've had?"

"Can you let me have ten pounds?" she asked bluntly, ignoring his implication that in the matter of nourishment she had not behaved sensibly.

"Ten pounds? More?" He was on the defensive, as it were crouching warily behind a screen of his suspicions. She nodded awkwardly. She wanted to be graceful, persuasive, enveloping, but she could not. It was to repay Janet that she had need of the money. She ought to have obtained it before, but she had postponed the demand, and she had been wrong. Janet would not require the money, she would have no immediate use for it, but Hilda could not bear to be in debt to her; to leave the sum outstanding would seem so strange, so sinister, so equivocal; it would mar all their intercourse.

"But look here, child," said Edwin, protesting, "I've given you about forty times as much as you can possibly want already."

He had never squarely refused any demand of hers for money; he had almost always acceded instantly and without

inquiry to her demands. Obviously he felt sympathy with the woman who by eternal custom is forced to ask, and had a horror of behaving as the majority of husbands notoriously behaved in such circumstances, obviously he was anxious not to avail himself of the husband's overwhelming economic advantage. Nevertheless, the fact that he earned and she didn't was ever mysteriously present in his relatively admirable attitude. And sometimes—perhaps not without grounds, she admitted—he would hesitate before a request, and in him a hesitation was as humiliating as a refusal would have been from another man. And Hilda resented, not so much his attitude, as the whole social convention upon which it was unassailably based. He earned, she knew. She would not deny that he was the unique source and that without him there would be naught. But still she did not think that she ought to have to ask. On the other hand she had no alternative plan to offer. Her criticism of the convention was destructive, not constructive. And all Edwin's careful regard for a woman's susceptibilities seemed only to intensify her deep-hidden revolt. It was a mere chance that he was thus chivalrous. And whether he was chivalrous or not, she was in his power; and she chafed.

"I should be glad if you could let me have it," she said grimly.

The appeal, besides being unpersuasive in manner, was too general; it did not particularize. There was no frankness between them. She saw his suspicions multiplying. What did he suspect? What could he suspect? . . . Ah! And why was she herself so timorous, so strangely excited, about going even to the edge of Dartmoor? And why did she feel guilty, why was her glance so constrained?

"Well, I can't," he answered. "Not now; but if anything unexpected turns up, I can send you a cheque."

She was beaten.

The cab stopped at the front-door, well in advance of time.

"It's for Janet," she muttered to him desperately.

Edwin's face changed.

"Why in thunder didn't you say so to start with?" he exclaimed. "I'll see what I can do. Of course I've got a fiver in my pocket-book."

There were a number of men in the town who made a point of always having a reserve five-pound note and a telegraph-form upon their persons. It was the dandyism of well-off prudence.

He sprang out of the room. The door swung to behind him.

In a very few moments he returned.

"Here you are!" he said, taking the note from his pocket-book and adding it to a collection of gold and silver.

Hilda was looking out of the window at the tail of the cab. She did not move.

"I don't want it, thanks," she replied coldly. And she thought: "What a fool I am!"

"Oh!" he murmured, with constraint.

"You'd do it for her!" said Hilda, chill and clear, "but you wouldn't do it for me." And she thought: "Why do I say such a thing?"

He slapped all the money crossly down on the desk and left the room. She could hear him instructing Ada and the cabman in the manipulation of the great portmanteau.

"Now, mother!" cried George.

She gazed at the money, and, picking it up, shovelled it into her purse. It was irresistible.

In the hall she kissed George, and nodded with a plaintive smile at Ada. Edwin was in the porch. He held back; she held back. She knew from his face that he would not offer to kiss her. The strange power that had compelled her to alienate him refused to allow her to relent. She passed down the steps out into the rain. They nodded, the theory for George and Ada being that they had made their farewells in the boudoir. But George and Ada none the less had their notions. It appeared to Hilda that instead of going for a holiday with her closest friend, she was going to some recondite disaster that involved the end of marriage. And the fact that she and Edwin had not kissed outweighed all other facts in the universe. Yet what was a kiss? Until the cab laboriously started she hoped for a miracle. It did not happen. If only on the previous night she had not absolutely insisted that nobody from the house should accompany her to Knype! . . . The porch slipped from her vision.

## CHAPTER XIV

### TAVY MANSION

#### I

**H**ILDA and Harry Hesketh stood together in the soft, warm Devonshire sunshine bending above the foot-high wire-netting that separated the small ornamental pond from the lawn. By their side was a St. Bernard dog with his great baptizing tongue hanging out. Two swans, glittering in the strong light, swam slowly to and fro ; one had a black claw tucked up on his back among downy white feathers ; the other hissed at the dog, who in his vast and shaggy good-nature simply could not understand this malevolence on the part of a fellow-creature. Round about the elegant haughtiness of the swans clustered a number of iridescent Muscovy ducks, and a few white Aylesburys with gamboge beaks that intermittently quacked, all restless and expectant of blessings to fall over the wire-netting that eternally separated them from the heavenly hunting-ground of the lawn. Across the pond, looking into a moored dinghy, an enormous drake with a vermilion top-knot reposed on the balustrade of the landing-steps. The water reflected everything in a rippled medley—blue sky, rounded, woolly clouds, birds, shrubs, flowers, grasses, and brownly-olive depths of the plantation beyond the pond, where tiny children in white were tumbling and shrieking with a nurse in white.

Harry was extraordinarily hospitable, kind, and agreeable to his guest. Scarcely thirty, tall and slim, he carried himself with distinction. His flannels were spotless ; his white shirt was spotless ; his tennis shoes were spotless ; but his blazer, cap, and neck-tie (which all had the same multi-coloured pattern of stripes) were shabby, soiled, and without shape ; nevertheless, their dilapidation seemed only to adorn his dandyism, for they possessed a mysterious sacred quality.



He had a beautiful moustache, nice eyes, hands excitingly dark with hair, and no affectations whatever. Although he had inherited Tavy Mansion and a fortune from an aunt who had left Oldcastle and the smoke to marry a Devonshire landowner, he was boyish, modest, and ingenuous. Nobody could have guessed from his manner that he had children, nurses, servants, gardeners, grooms, horses, carriages, a rent-roll, and a safe margin at every year's end. He spoke of the Five Towns with a mild affection. Hilda thought, looking at him: "He has everything, simply everything! And yet he's quite unspoilt!" In spite of the fact that in previous years he had seen Hilda only a few times—and that quite casually at the Orgreaves—he had assumed and established intimacy at the very moment of meeting her and Janet at Tavistock station the night before, and their friendship might now have been twenty years old instead of twenty hours. Very obviously he belonged to a class superior to Hilda's, but he was apparently quite unconscious of what was still the most deeply-rooted and influential institution of English life. His confiding confidential tone flattered her.

"How do you think Alicia's looking?" he asked.

"Magnificent," said Hilda, throwing a last piece of bread into the water.

"So do I," said he. "But she's ruined for tennis, you know. This baby business is spiffing, only it puts you right off your game. As a rule she manages to be *hors de combat* bang in the middle of the season. She *has* been able to play a bit this year, but she's not keen—that's what's up with her ladyship—she's not keen now."

"Well," said Hilda. "Even you can't have everything."

"Why 'even' me?" he laughed.

She merely gazed at him with a mysterious smile. She perceived that he was admiring her—probably for her enigmatic quality, so different from Alicia's—and she felt a pleasing self-content.

"Edwin do much tennis nowadays?"

"Edwin?" She repeated the name in astonishment, as though it were the name of somebody who could not possibly be connected with tennis. "Not he! He's not touched a racket all this reason. He's quite otherwise employed."

"I hear he's a fearful pot in the Five Towns, anyway," said Harry seriously. "Making money hand over fist."

Hilda raised her eyebrows and shook her head deprecatingly. But the marked respectfulness of Harry's reference to Edwin was agreeable. She thought: "I do believe I'm becoming a snob!"

"It's hard work making money, even in our small way, in Bursley," she said—and seemed to indicate the expensive spaciousness of the gardens.

"I should like to see old Edwin again."

"I never knew you were friends."

"Well, I used to see him pretty often at Lane End House, after Alicia and I were engaged. In fact once he jolly nearly beat me in a set."

"Edwin did?" she exclaimed.

"The same. . . . He had a way of saying things that a feller somehow thought about afterwards."

"Oh! So you noticed that!"

"Does he still?"

"I—I don't know. But he used to."

"You ought to have brought him. In fact I quite thought he was coming. Anyhow, I told Alicia to invite him, too, as soon as we knew you were bringing old Jan down."

"She did mention it, Alicia did. But, oh! He wouldn't hear of it. Works! Works! No holiday all summer."

"I'll tell you a scheme," said Harry roguishly. "Refuse to join the domestic hearth until he comes and fetches you."

She gave a little laugh. "Oh, he won't come to fetch me."

"Well," said Harry shortly and decisively, "we shall see what can be done. I may tell you we're rather great at getting people down here. . . . I wonder where those girls are?" He turned round and Hilda turned round.

The red Georgian house with its windows in octagonal panes, its large pediment hiding the centre of the roof, and its white paint, showed brilliantly across the hoop-studded green, between some cypresses and an ilex; on either side were smooth walls of green—trimmed shrubs forming long alleys whose floors were also green; and here and there a round or oval flower-bed, and, at the edges of the garden, curved borders of flowers. Everything was still, save the

ship-like birds on the pond, the distant children in the plantation, and the slow-moving, small clouds overheard. The sun's warmth was like an endearment.

Janet and Alicia, their arms round each other's shoulders, sauntered into view from behind the cypresses. On the more sheltered lawn nearest the house they were engaged in a quiet but tremendous palaver; nobody but themselves knew what they were talking about; it might have been the affair of Johnnie and Mrs. Chris Hamson, as to which not a word had been publicly said at Tavy Mansion since Janet and Hilda's arrival. Janet still wore black, and now she carried a red sunshade belonging to Alicia. Alicia was in white, not very clean white, and rather tousled. She was only twenty-five. She had grown big and jolly and downright (even to a certain shamelessness) and careless of herself. Her body had the curves, and her face the emaciation, of the young mother. She used abrupt, gawky, kind-hearted gestures. Her rough affectionateness embraced not merely her children, but all young living things, and many old. For her children she had a passion. And she would say openly, as it were, defiantly, that she meant to be the mother of more children—lots more.

"Hey, lass!" cried out Harry, using the broad Staffordshire accent for the amusement of Hilda.

The sisters stopped and untwined their arms.

"Hey, lad!" Alicia loudly responded. But instead of looking at her husband she was looking through him at the babies in the plantation behind the pond.

Janet smiled, in her everlasting resignation. Hilda, smiling at her in return from the distance, recalled the tone in which Harry had said 'old Jan'—a tone at once affectionate and half-contemptuous. She *was* old Jan, now; destined to be a burden upon somebody and of very little use to anybody; no longer necessary. If she disappeared, life would immediately close over her, and not a relative, not a friend, would be inconvenienced. Some among them would remark: "Perhaps it's for the best." And Janet knew it. In the years immediately preceding the death of Mr. and Mrs. Orgreave, she had hardened a little from her earlier soft, benevolent self—hardened to everybody save her father and mother, whom she protected—and now she was utterly tender

again, and her gentle acquiescences seemed to say: "I am defenceless, and to-morrow I shall be old."

"I'm going to telegraph to Edwin Clayhanger to come down for the week-end," shouted Harry.

And Alicia shouted in reply:

"Oh, spiffing!"

Hilda said nervously:

"You aren't, really?"

She had no intention of agreeing to the pleasant project. A breach definitely existed between Edwin and herself, and the idea of either maintaining it or ending it on foreign ground was inconceivable. Such things could only be done at home. She had telegraphed a safe arrival, but she had not yet written to him nor decided in what tone she should write.

Two gardeners, one pushing a wheeled water-can, appeared from an alley and began silently and assiduously to water a shaded flower-bed. Alicia and Harry continued to shout enthusiastically to each other in a manner sufficiently disturbing, but the gardeners gave no sign that anybody except themselves lived in the garden. Alicia, followed by Janet, was slowly advancing towards the croquet lawn when a parlourmaid tripping from the house overtook her, and with modest deference murmured something to the bawling, jolly mistress. Alicia, still followed by Janet, turned and went into the house, while the parlourmaid with bent head waited discreetly to bring up the rear.

A sudden and terrific envy possessed Hilda as she contrasted the circumstances of these people with her own. These people lived in lovely and cleanly surroundings without a care beyond the apprehension of nursery ailments. They had joyous and kindly dispositions. They were well-bred, and they were attended by servants who, professionally, were even better bred than themselves, and who were rendered happy by smooth words and good pay. They lived at peace with every one. Full of health, they ate well and slept well. They suffered no strain. They had absolutely no problems, and they did not seek problems. Nor had they any duties, save agreeable ones to each other. Their world was ideal. If you had asked them how their world could be improved for them, they would not have found an easy reply.

They could only have demanded less taxes and more fine days. . . . Whereas Hilda and hers were forced to live among a brutal populace, amid the most horrible surroundings of smoke, dirt, and squalor. In Devonshire the Five Towns was unthinkable ; the whiteness of the window-curtains at Tavy Mansion almost broke the heart of the housewife in Hilda. And compare—not Hilda's handkerchief-garden, but even the old garden of the Orgreaves, with this elysium, where nothing offended the eye and the soot nowhere lay on the trees, blackening the shiny leaves and stunting the branches. And compare the too mean planning and space-saving of the house in Trafalgar Road with the lavish generosity of space inside Tavy Mansion ! . . .

Edwin in the Bursley sense was a successful man, and had consequence in the town, but the most that he had accomplished or could accomplish would not amount to the beginning of appreciable success according to higher standards. Nobody in Bursley really knew the meaning of the word success. And even such local success as Edwin had had—at what peril and with what worry was it won ! These Heskeths were safe for ever. Ah ! She envied them, and she intensely depreciated everything that was hers. She stood in the Tavy Mansion garden—it seemed to her—like an impostor. Her husband was merely struggling upwards. And, moreover, she had quarrelled with him, darkly and obscurely ; and who could guess what would be the end of marriage ? Harry and Alicia never quarrelled ; they might have tiffs—nothing worse than that ; they had no grounds for quarrelling. . . . And supposing Harry and Alicia guessed the link connecting her with Dartmoor prison ! . . . No, it could not be supposed. Her envy melted into secret deep dejection amid the beautiful and prosperous scene.

“ Evidently some one's called,” said Harry, of his wife's disappearance. “ I hope she's nice.”

“ Who ? ”

“ Whoever's called. Shall we knock the balls about a bit ? ”

They began a mild game of croquet, but after a few minutes Hilda burst out sharply :

“ You aren't playing your best, Mr. Hesketh. I wish you would.”



He was startled by her eyes and her tone.

"Honest Injun! I am," he fibbed in answer. "But I'll try to do better. You must remember croquet isn't my game. Alicia floors me at it five times out of six."

Then the parlourmaid and another maid came out to lay tea on two tables under the ilex.

"Bowley," said Harry over his shoulder. "Bring me a telegraph-form next time you come out, will you?"

"Yes, sir," said the parlourmaid.

Hilda protested:

"No, Mr. Hesketh! Really! I assure you——"

The telegraph-form came with the tea. Harry knocked a ball against a coloured stick, and both he and Hilda sat down with relief.

"Who's called, Bowley?"

"Mrs. Rotherwas, sir."

Harry counted the cups.

"Isn't she staying for tea?"

"No, sir. I think not, sir."

Hilda, humming, rose and walked about. At the same moment Alicia, Janet, and a tall young woman in black and yellow emerged from the house. Hilda moved behind a tree. She could hear good-byes. The group vanished round the side of the house, and then came the sound of hoofs and of wheels crunching. An instant later Alicia arrived at the ilex, bounding and jolly; Janet moved more sedately. The St. Bernard, who had been reposing near the pond, now smelt the tea and hot cakes and joined the party. The wagging of his powerful tail knocked over a wicker-chair, and Alicia gave a squeal. Then Alicia, putting her hands to her mouth, shouted across the lawn and the pond:

"Nurse! Nurse! Take them in!"

And a faint reply came.

"What was the Rotherwas dame after?" asked Harry, sharpening a pencil, when Alicia had ascertained the desires of her guests as to milk and sugar.

"She was after you, of course," said Alicia. "Tennis party on Monday. She wants you to balance young Truscott. I just told her so. We shall all go. You'll go, Hilda. She'll be delighted. I should have brought her along only she was in such a hurry."

Hilda inquired :

“ Who is Mrs. Rotherwas ? ”

“ Her husband’s a big coalowner at Cardiff. But she’s a niece or something of the Governor of Dartmoor prison, and she’s apparently helping to keep house for dear uncle just now. They’ll take us over the prison before tennis. It’s awfully interesting. Harry and I have been once.”

“ Oh ! ” murmured Hilda, staggered.

“ Now about this ’ere woire,” said Harry. “ What price this ? ” He handed over the message which he had just composed. It was rather long, and on the form was left space for only two more words.

Hilda could not decipher it. She saw the characters with her eyes, but she was incapable of interpreting them. All the time she thought :

“ I shall go to that prison. I can’t help it. I shan’t be able to keep from going. I shall go to that prison. I must go. Who could have imagined this ? I am bound to go, and I shall go.”

But instead of objecting totally to the dispatch of the telegram, she said in a strange voice :

“ It’s very nice of you.”

“ You fill up the rest of the form,” said Harry, offering the pencil.

“ What must I put ? ”

“ Well, you’d better put ‘ Countersigned, Hilda.’ That’ll fix it.”

“ Will you write it ? ” she muttered.

He wrote the words.

“ Let poor mummy see ! ” Alicia complained, seizing the telegraph-form.

Harry called out :

“ Leeks ! ”

A shirt-sleeved gardener half hidden by foliage across the garden looked up sharply, saw Harry’s beckoning finger, and approached running.

“ Have that sent off for me, will you ? Tell Jos to take it,” said Harry, and gave Leeks the form and a florin.

“ Why, Hilda, you aren’t eating anything ! ” protested Alicia.

"I only want tea," said Hilda casually, wondering whether they had noticed anything wrong in her face.

## II

Edwin, looking curiously out of the carriage window as the train from Plymouth entered Tavistock station early on the Monday, was surprised to perceive Harry Hesketh on the platform. While, in the heavenly air of the September morning, the train was curving through Bickleigh Vale and the valley of the Plym and through the steeper valley of the Meavy, up towards the first fastnesses of the moor, he had felt his body to be almost miraculously well and his soul almost triumphant. But when he saw Harry—the remembered figure, but a little stouter and coarser—he saw a being easily more triumphant than himself.

Harry had great reason for triumph, for he had proved himself to possess a genius for deductive psychological reasoning and for prophecy. Edwin had been characteristically vague about the visit. First he had telegraphed that he could not come, business preventing. Then he had telegraphed that he would come, but only on Sunday, and he had given no particulars of trains. They had all assured one another that this was just like Edwin. "The man's mad!" said Harry with genial benevolence, and had set himself to one of his favourite studies—Bradshaw. He always handled Bradshaw like a master, accomplishing feats of interpretation that amazed his wife. He had announced, after careful connotations, that Edwin was perhaps, after all, not such a chump, but that he was in fact a chump, in that, having chosen the Bristol-Plymouth route, he had erred about the Sunday night train from Plymouth to Tavistock. How did he know that Edwin would choose the Bristol-Plymouth route? Well, his knowledge was derived from divination, based upon vast experience of human nature. Edwin would 'get stuck' at Plymouth. He would sleep at Plymouth—staying at the Royal (he hoped)—and would come on by the 8.1 a.m., on Monday, arriving at 8.59 a.m., where he would be met by Harry in the dogcart drawn by Joan. The telegraph office was of course closed after 10 a.m. on Sunday, but if it had been open and he had been receiving hourly

dispatches about Edwin's tortuous progress through England, Harry could not have been more sure of his position. And on the Monday Harry had risen up in the very apogee of health, and had driven Joan to the station. "Mark my words!" he had said, "I shall bring him back with me for breakfast." He had offered to take Hilda to the station to witness his triumph; but Hilda had not accepted.

And there Edwin was! Everything had happened according to Harry's prediction, except that, from an unfortunate modesty, Edwin had gone to the wrong hotel at Plymouth.

They shook hands in a glow of mutual pleasure.

"How on earth did you know?" Edwin began.

The careful-casual answer rounded off Harry's triumph. And Edwin thought: "Why, he's just like a grown-up boy!" But he was distinguished: his club neck-tie in all its decay was still impressive; and his expansive sincere goodwill was utterly delightful. Also the station, neat, clean, solid—the negation of all gimcrackery—had an aspect of goodwill to man; its advertisements did not flare; and it seemed to be the expression of a sound and self-respecting race. The silvern middle-aged guard greeted Harry with deferential heartiness and saluted Edwin with even more warmth than he had used at Plymouth. On the Sunday Edwin had noticed that in the western country guards were not guards (as in other parts of England), but rather the cordial hosts of their trains. As soon as the doors had banged in a fusillade and the engine whistled, a young porter came and, having exchanged civilities with Harry, picked up Edwin's bag. This porter's face and demeanour showed perfect content. His slight yet eager smile and his quick movements seemed to be saying: "It is natural and proper that I should salute you and carry your bag while you walk free. You are gentlemen by divine right, and by the same right I am a railway porter and happy." To watch the man at his job gave positive pleasure, and it was extraordinarily reassuring—reassuring about everything. Outside the station, the groom stood at Joan's head, and a wonderful fox-terrier sat alert under the dogcart. Instantly the dog sprang out and began to superintend the preparations for departure, rushing to and fro and insisting all the time that delay would be

monstrous, if not fatal. The dog's excellence as a specimen of breeding was so superlative as to accuse its breeder and owner of a lack of perspective in life. It was as if the entire resources of civilization had been employed towards the perfecting of the points of that dog.

"Balanced the cart, I suppose, Jos?" asked Harry, kindly.

"Yes, sir," was all that Jos articulated, but his bright face said: "Sir, your assumption that I have already balanced the cart for three and a bag is benevolent and justified. You trust me. I trust you, sir. All is well."

The bag was stowed and the porter got threepence and was so happy in his situation that apparently he could not bring himself to leave the scene. Harry climbed up on the right, Edwin on the left. The dog gave one short bark and flew madly forward. Jos loosed Joan's head, and at the same moment Harry gave a click, and the machine started. It did not wait for young Jos. Jos caught the back step as the machine swung by, and levered himself dangerously to the groom's place. And when he had done it he grinned, announcing to beholders that his mission in life was to do just that, and that it was a grand life and he a lucky and enviable fellow.

Harry drove across the Tavy, and through the small grey and brown town, so picturesque, so clean, so solid, so respectable, so content in its historicity. A policeman saluted amiably and firmly, as if saying: "I am protecting all this, —what a treasure!" Then they passed the Town Hall.

"Town Hall," said Harry.

"Oh!"

"The Dook's," said Harry.

He put on a certain facetiousness, but there nevertheless escaped from him the conviction that the ownership of a town hall by a duke was a wondrous rare phenomenon and fine, showing the strength of grand English institutions and traditions, and meet for honest English pride. (And you could say what you liked about progress!) And Edwin had just the same feeling. In another minute they were out of the town. The country-side, though bleak, with its spare hedges and granite walls, was exquisitely beautiful in the morning light; and it was tidy, tended, mature; it was as



though it had nothing to learn from the future. Beyond rose the slopes of the moor, tonic and grim. An impression of health, moral and physical, everywhere disengaged itself. The wayfarer, sturdy and benign, invigorated by his mere greeting. The trot of the horse on the smooth winding road, the bounding of the dog, the resilience of the cart-springs, the sharp tang of the air on the cheek, all helped to perfect Edwin's sense of pleasure in being alive. He could not deny that he had stood in need of a change. He had been worrying, perhaps through overwork. Overwork was a mistake. He now saw that there was no reason why he should not be happy always, even with Hilda. He had received a short but nice and almost apologetic letter from Hilda. As for his apprehensions, what on earth did it matter about Dartmoor being so near? Nothing! This district was marvellously reassuring. He thought: "There simply *is* no social question down here!"

"Had your breakfast?" asked Harry.

"Yes, thanks."

"Well, you just haven't, then!" said Harry. "We shall be in the nick of time for it."

"When do you have breakfast?"

"Nine-thirty."

"Bit late, isn't it?"

"Oh, no! It suits us. . . . I say!" Harry stared straight between the horse's ears.

"What?"

Harry murmured:

"No more news about Johnnie, I suppose?"

(Edwin glanced half round at the groom behind. Harry with a gesture indicated that the groom was negligible.)

"Not that I've heard. Bit stiff, isn't it?" Edwin answered.

"Bit stiff? I should rather say it was. Especially after Jimmie's performance. Rather hard lines on Alicia, don't you think?"

"On all of 'em," said Edwin, not seeing why Johnnie's escapade should press more on Alicia than, for example, on Janet.

"Yes, of course," Harry agreed, evidently seeing and accepting the point. "The less said the better!"

... "I'm with you," said Edwin.

Harry resumed his jolly tone :

“ Well, you’d better peck a bit. We’ve planned a hard day for you.”

“ Oh ! ”

“ Yes. Early lunch, and then we’re going to drive over to Princetown. Tennis with the Governor of the prison. He’ll show us all over the prison. It’s worth seeing.”

Impulsively Edwin exclaimed :

“ All of you ? Is Hilda going ? ”

“ Certainly. Why not ? ” He raised the whip and pointed : “ Behold our noble towers.”

Edwin, feeling really sick, thought :

“ Hilda’s mad. She’s quite mad. . . . Morbid isn’t the word ! ”

He was confounded.

### III

At Tavy Mansion Edwin and Harry were told by a maid that Mrs. Hesketh and Miss Orgreave were in the nursery and would be down in a moment, but that Mrs. Clayhanger had a headache and was remaining in bed for breakfast. The master of the house himself took Edwin to the door of his wife’s bedroom. Edwin’s spirits had risen in an instant, as he perceived the cleverness of Hilda’s headache. There could be no doubt that women were clever, though perhaps unscrupulously and crudely clever, in a way beyond the skill of men. By the simple device of suffering from a headache Hilda had avoided the ordeal of meeting a somewhat estranged husband in public ; she was also preparing an excuse for not going to Princetown and the prison. Certainly it was better, in the Dartmoor affair, to escape at the last moment than to have declined the project from the start.

As he opened the bedroom-door, apprehensions and bright hope were mingled in him. He had a weighty grievance against Hilda, whose behaviour at parting had been, he considered, inexcusable ; but the warm tone of her curt private telegram to him and of her almost equally curt letter, re-stating her passionate love, was really equivalent to an apology, which he had accepted with eagerness. Moreover he had done a lot in coming to Devonshire, and for this great act he lauded

himself and he expected some gratitude. Nevertheless, despite the pacificism of his feelings, he could not smile when entering the room. No, he could not !

Hilda was lying in the middle of a very wide bed, and her dark hair was spread abroad upon the pillow. On the pedestal was a tea-tray. Squatted comfortably at Hilda's side, with her left arm as a support, was a baby about a year old, dressed for the day. This was Cecil, born the day after his grandparents' funeral. Cecil, with mouth open and outstretched pink hands, of which the fingers were spread like the rays of half a starfish, from wide eyes gazed at Edwin with a peculiar expression of bland irony. Hilda smiled lovingly ; she smiled without reserve. And as soon as she smiled, Edwin could smile, and his heart was suddenly quite light.

Hilda thought :

" That wistful look in his eyes has never changed, and it never will. Imagine him travelling on Sunday, when the silly old thing might just as well have come on Saturday, if he'd had anybody to decide him ! He's been travelling for twenty-four hours or more, and now he's here ! What a shame for me to have dragged him down here in spite of himself ! But he would do it for me ! He has done it. . . . I had to have him, for this afternoon ! . . . After all, he must be very good at business. Every one respects him, even here. We may end by being really rich. Have I ever really appreciated him ? . . . And now of course he's going to be annoyed again. Poor boy ! "

" Hello ! Who's this ? " cried Edwin.

" This is Cecil. His mummy's left him here with his Auntie Hilda," said Hilda.

" Another clever dodge of hers ! " thought Edwin. He liked the baby being there.

He approached the bed, and, staring nervously about, saw that his bag had already mysteriously reached the bedroom.

" Well, my poor boy ! What a journey ! " Hilda murmured compassionately. She could not help showing that she was his mother in wisdom and sense.

" Oh, no ! " he amiably dismissed this view.

He was standing over her by the bedside. She looked straight up at him timid and expectant. He bent and kissed

her. Under his kiss she shifted slightly in the bed, and her arms clung round his neck, and by her arms she lifted herself a little towards him. She shut her eyes. She would not loose him. She seemed again to be drawing the life out of him. At last she let him go, and gave a great sigh. All the past which did not agree with that kiss and that sigh of content was annihilated, and an immense reassurance filled Edwin's mind.

"So you've got a headache?"

She gave a succession of little nods, smiling happily.

"I'm so glad you've come, dearest," she said, after a pause. She was just like a young girl, like a child, in her relieved satisfaction. "What about George?"

"Well, as it was left to me to decide, I thought I'd better ask Maggie to come and stay in the house. Much better than packing him off to Auntie Hamps's."

"And she came?"

"Oh, yes!" said Edwin, indifferently, as if to say: "Of course she came."

"Then you did get my letter in time?"

"I shouldn't have got it in time if I'd left Saturday morning, as you wanted. Oh! And here's a letter for *you*."

He pulled a letter from his pocket. The envelope was of the peculiar tinted paper with which he had already been familiarized. Hilda became self-conscious as she took the letter and opened it. Edwin, too, was self-conscious. To lighten the situation, he put his little finger in the baby's mouth. Cecil much appreciated this form of humour, and as soon as the finger was withdrawn from his toothless gums, he made a bubbling whirring noise, and waved his arms to indicate that the game must continue. Hilda, frowning, read the letter. Edwin sat down, ledging himself cautiously on the brink of the bed, and leaned back a little so as to be able to get at the baby and tickle it among its frills. From the distance, beyond walls, he could hear the powerful, happy cries of older babies, beings fully aware of themselves, who knew their own sentiments and could express them. And he glanced round the long low room with its two small open windows showing sunlit yellow cornfields and high trees, and its monumental furniture, and the disorder of Hilda's

clothes and implements humanizing it and individualizing it and making it her abode, her lair. And he glanced prudently at Hilda over the letter-paper. She had no headache; it was obvious that she had no headache. Yet in the most innocent touching way she had nodded an affirmative to his question about the headache. He could not possibly have said to her: "Look here, you know you haven't got a headache." She would not have tolerated the truth. The truth would have made her transform herself instantly into a martyr, and him into a brute. She would have stuck to it, even if the seat of eternal judgment had suddenly been installed at the brassy foot of the bed, that she had a headache.

It was with this mentality (he reflected, assuming that his own mentality never loved anything as well as truth) that he had to live till one of them expired. He reminded himself wisely that the woman's code is different from the man's. But the honesty of his intelligence rejected such an explanation, such an excuse. It was not that the woman had a different code,—she had no code except the code of the utter opportunist. To live with her was like living with a marvellous wild animal, full of grace, of cunning, of magnificent passionate gestures, of terrific affection, and of cruelty. She was at once indispensable and intolerable. He felt that to match her he had need of all his force, all his prescience, all his duplicity. The mystery that had lain between him and Hilda for a year was in the letter within two feet of his nose. He could watch her as she read, study her face; he knew that he was the wiser of the two; she was at a disadvantage; as regards the letter, she was fighting on ground chosen by him; and yet he could not in the least foresee the next ten minutes,—whether she would advance, retreat, feint, or surrender.

"Did you bring your dress-clothes?" she murmured, while she was reading. She had instructed him in her letter on this point.

"Of course," he said, manfully, striving to imply the immense untruth that he never stirred from home without his dress-clothes.

She continued to read, frowning, and drawing her heavy eyebrows still closer together. Then she said:



"Here!"

And passed him the letter. He could see now that she was becoming excited.

The letter was from the legitimate Mrs. George Cannon, and it said that, though nothing official was announced or even breathed, her solicitor had gathered from a permanent and important underling of the Home Office that George Cannon's innocence was supposed to be established, and that the Queen's pardon would, at some time or other, be issued. It was an affecting letter. Edwin, totally ignorant of all that had preceded it, did not immediately understand its significance. At first he did not even grasp what it was about. When he did begin to comprehend he had the sensation of being deprived momentarily of his bearings. He had expected everything but this. That is to say, he had absolutely not known what to expect. The shock was severe.

"*What is it? What is it?*" he questioned, as if impatient.

Hilda replied:

"It's about George Cannon. It seems he was quite innocent in that bank-note affair. It's his wife who's been writing to me about it. I don't know why she should. But she did, and of course I had to reply."

"You never said anything to me about it."

"I didn't want to worry you, dearest. I knew you'd quite enough on your mind with the works. Besides, I'd no right to worry you with a thing like *that*. But of course I can show you all her letters,—I've kept them."

Unanswerable! Unanswerable! Insincere, concocted, but unanswerable! The implications in her spoken defence were of the simplest and deepest ingenuity, and withal they hurt him. For example, the implication that the strain of the new works was breaking him! As if he could not support it, and had not supported it, easily! As if the new works meant that he could not fulfil all his duties as a helpmeet! And then the devilishly adroit plea that her concealment was morally necessary since he ought not to be troubled with any result of her preconjugal life! And finally the implication that he would be jealous of the correspondence and might exact the production of it! . . . He now callously ignored Cecil's signals for attention. . . . He knew that he would

receive no further enlightenment as to the long secrecy of the past twelve months. His fears and apprehensions and infelicity were to be dismissed with those few words. They would never be paid for, redeemed, atoned. The grand scenic explanation and submission which was his right would never come. Sentimentally, he was cheated, and had no redress. And, as a climax, he had to assume, to pretend, that justice still prevailed on earth.

"Isn't it awful!" Hilda muttered. "Him in prison all this time!"

He saw that her eyes were wet, and her emotion increasing. He nodded in sympathy.

He thought:

"She'll want some handling,—I can see that!"

He too, as well as she, imaginatively comprehended the dreadful tragedy of George Cannon's false imprisonment. He had heart enough to be very glad that the innocent man (innocent at any rate of that one thing) was to be released. But at the same time he could not stifle a base foreboding and regret. Looking at his wife, he feared the moment when George Cannon, with all the enormous prestige of a victim in a woman's eyes, should be at large. Yes, the lover in him would have preferred George Cannon to be incarcerated for ever. Had he not heard, had he not read, had he not seen on the stage, that a woman never forgets the first man? Nonsense, all that! Invented theatrical psychology! And yet—if it was true! . . . Look at her eyes!

"I suppose he *is* innocent?" he said gruffly, for he mistrusted, or affected to mistrust, the doings of these two women together,—Cannon's wife and Cannon's victim. Might they not somehow have been hoodwinked? He knew nothing, no useful detail, naught that was convincing—and he never would know! Was it not astounding that the bigamist should have both these women on his side, either working for him, or weeping over his woes?

"He must be innocent," Hilda answered, thoughtfully, in a breaking voice.

"Where is he now,—up yon?"

He indicated the unvisited heights of Dartmoor.

"I believe so."

"I thought they always shifted 'em back to London before they released 'em."

"I expect they will do. They may have moved him already."

His mood grew soft, indulgent. He conceded that her emotion was natural. She had been bound up with the man. Cannon's admitted guilt on the one count, together with all that she had suffered through it, only intensified the poignancy of his innocence on the other count. Contrary to the general assumption, you must be sorrier for an unfortunate rascal than for an unfortunate good man. He could feel all that. He, Edwin, was to be pitied; but nobody save himself would perceive that he was to be pitied. His own rôle would be difficult, but all his pride and self-reliance commanded him to play it well, using every resource of his masculine skill, and so prove that he was that which he believed himself to be. The future would be all right, because he would be equal to the emergency. Why should it not be all right? His heart in kindness and tenderness drew nearer to Hilda's, and he saw, or fancied he saw, that all their guerrilla had been leading up to this, had perhaps been caused by this, and would be nobly ended by it.

Just then a mysterious noise penetrated the room, growing and growing until it became a huge deafening din, and slowly died away.

"I expect that's breakfast," said Edwin in a casual tone.

The organism of the English household was functioning. Even in the withdrawn calm of the bedroom they could feel it irresistibly functioning. The gong had a physical effect on Cecil; all his disappointment and his sense of being neglected were gathered up in his throat and exploded in a yell. Hilda took him in her right arm and soothed him and called him silly names.

Edwin rose from the bed, and as he did so, Hilda retained him with her left hand, and pulled him very gently towards her, inviting a kiss. He kissed her. She held to him. He could see at a distance of two inches all the dark swimming colour of her wet eyes half veiled by the long lashes. And he could feel the soft limbs of the snuffling baby somewhere close to his head.

"You'd better stick where you are," he advised her in a casual tone.

Hilda thought :

"Now the time's come. He'll be furious, but I can't help it."

She said :

"Oh, no ! I shall be quite all right soon. I'm going to get up in about half an hour."

"But then how shall you get out of going to Princetown ?"

"Oh ! Edwin ! I must go ! I told them I should go."

He was astounded. There was no end to her incalculability,—no end ! His resentment was violent. He stood right away from her.

"'Told them you should go !'" he exclaimed. "What in the name of heaven does that matter ? Are you absolutely mad ?"

She stiffened. Her features hardened. In the midst of her terrible relief as to the fate of George Cannon and of her equal terrible excitement under the enigmatic and irresistible mesmerism of Dartmoor prison, she was desperate, and resentment against Edwin kindled deep within her. She felt the brute in him. She felt that he would never really understand. She felt all her weakness and all his strength, but she was determined. At bottom she knew well that her weakness was the stronger.

"I must go !" she repeated.

"It's nothing but morbidness !" he said savagely. "Morbidness ! . . . Well, I shan't have it. I shan't let you go. And that's flat."

She kept silent. Frightfully disturbed, cursing women, forgetting utterly in a moment his sublime resolves, Edwin descended to breakfast in the large, strange house. Existence was monstrous.

And before the middle of the morning Hilda came into the garden where every one else was idling. And Alicia and Janet fondly kissed her. She said her headache had vanished.

"Sure you feel equal to going this afternoon, dearest ?" asked Janet.

"Oh, yes !" Hilda replied lightly. "It will do me good."

Edwin was helpless. He thought, recalling with vexation his last firm forbidding words to Hilda in the bedroom :

"Nobody *could* be equal to this emergency."

## CHAPTER XV

### THE PRISON

#### I

**H**ARRY had two stout and fast cobs in a light wagonette. He drove himself, and Hilda sat by his side. The driver's boast was that he should accomplish the ten miles, with a rise of a thousand feet, in an hour and a quarter. A hired carriage would have spent two hours over the journey.

It was when they had cleared the town, and were on the long straight rise across the moor towards Longford, that the horses began to prove the faith that was in them, eager, magnanimous, conceiving grandly the splendour of their task in life, and irrepressibly performing it with glory. The stones on the loose-surfaced road flew from under the striding of their hoofs into the soft, dark ling on either hand. Harry's whip hovered in affection over their twin backs, never touching them, and Harry smiled mysteriously to himself. He did not wish to talk. Nor did Hilda. The movement braced and intoxicated her, and rendered thought impossible. She brimmed with emotion, like a vase with some liquid unanalysable and perilous. She was not happy, she was not unhappy; the sensation of her vitality and of the kindred vitality of the earth and the air was overwhelming. She would have prolonged the journey indefinitely, and yet she intensely desired the jail, whatever terrors it might hold for her. At intervals she pulled up the embroidered and monogrammed apron that slipped slowly down over her skirt and over Harry's tennis flannels, disclosing two rackets in a press that lay between them. Perhaps Harry was thinking of certain strokes at tennis.

"Longford!" ejaculated Harry, turning his head slightly towards the body of the vehicle, as they rattled by a hamlet.



Soon afterwards the road mounted steeply,—five hundred feet in little more than a mile, and the horses walked, but they walked in haste, fiercely, clawing at the road with their forefeet and thrusting it behind them. And some of the large tors emerged clearly into view—Cox Tor, the Staple Tors, and Great Mis lifting its granite above them and beyond.

They were now in the midst of the moor, trotting fast again. Behind and before them, and on either side, there was nothing but moor and sky. The sky, a vast hemisphere of cloud and blue and sunshine, with a complex and ever elusive geography of its own, discovered all the tints of heath and granite. It was one of those days when every tint was divided into ten thousand shades, and each is richer and more softly beautiful than the others. On the shoulder of Great Mis rain fell, while little Vixen Tor glittered with mica points in the sun. Nothing could be seen over the whole moor save here and there a long-tailed pony, or a tiny cottage set apart in solitude. And the yellowish road stretched forward, wavily, narrowing, disappeared for a space, reappeared still narrower, disappeared once more, reappeared like a thin meandering line, and was lost on the final verge. It was an endless road. Impossible that the perseverance of horses should cover it yard by yard! But the horses strained onward, seeing naught but the macadam under their noses. Harry checked them at a descent.

“Walkham River!” he announced.

They crossed a pebbly stream by a granite bridge.

“Hut-circles!” said Harry laconically.

They were climbing again.

Edwin, in the body of the wagonette with Janet and Alicia, looked for hut-circles and saw none; but he did not care. He was content with the knowledge that prehistoric hut-circles were somewhere there. He had never seen wild England before, and its primeval sanity awoke in him the primeval man. The healthiness and simplicity and grandiose beauty of it created the sublime illusion that civilization was worthy to be abandoned. The Five Towns seemed intolerable by their dirt and ugliness, and by the tedious intricacy of their existence. Lithography,—you had but to think of the word to perceive the paltriness of the thing! Riches,

properties, proprieties, all the safeties,—futile ! He could have lived alone with Hilda on the moor, begetting children by her, watching with satisfaction the growing curves of her fecundity—his work, and seeing her with her brood, all their faces beaten by wind and rain and browned with sun. He had a tremendous, a painful longing for such a life. His imagination played round the idea of it with voluptuous and pure pleasure, and he wondered that he had never thought of it before. He felt that he had never before peered into the depths of existence. And though he knew that the dream of such an arcadian career was absurd, yet he seemed to guess that beneath the tiresome surfaces of life in the Five Towns the essence of it might be mystically lived. And he thought that Hilda would be capable of sharing it with him,—nay, he knew she would !

His mood became gravely elated, even optimistic. He saw that he had worried himself about nothing. If she wanted to visit the prison, let her visit it ! Why not ? At any rate he should not visit it. He had an aversion for morbidity almost as strong as his aversion for sentimentality. But her morbidity could do no harm. She could not possibly meet George Cannon. The chances were utterly against such an encounter. Her morbidity would cure itself. He pitied her, cherished her, and in thought enveloped her fondly with his sympathetic and protective wisdom.

“North Hessary !” said Harry, pointing with his whip to a jutting tor on the right hand. “We go round by the foot of it. There in a jiff !”

Soon afterwards they swerved away from the main road, obeying a signpost marked, ‘Princetown.’

“Glorious, isn’t it ?” murmured Janet, after a long silence which had succeeded the light chatter of herself and Alicia about children, servants, tennis, laundries.

He nodded, with a lively responsive smile, and glanced at Hilda’s mysterious back. Only once during the journey had she looked round. Alicia with her coarse kind voice and laugh began to rally him, saying he had dozed.

A town, more granite than the moor itself, gradually revealed its roofs in the heart of the moor. The horses, indefatigable, quickened their speed. Villas, a school, a

chapel, a heavy church tower followed in succession ; there were pavements ; a brake full of excursionists had halted in front of an hotel ; holiday-makers—simple folk who disliked to live in flocks—wandered in ecstatic idleness. Concealed within the warmth of the mountain air, there pricked a certain sharpness. All about, beyond the little town, the tors raised their shaggy flanks surmounted by colossal mass s of stone that recalled the youth of the planet. The feel of the world was stimulating like a tremendous tonic. Then the wagonette passed a thick grove of trees, hiding a house, and in a moment, like magic, appeared a huge gated archway of brick and stone, and over it the incised words :

### PARCERE SUBJECTIS

“ Stop ! Stop ! Harry,” cried Alicia shrilly. “ What are you doing ? You’ll have to go to the house first.”

“ Shall I ? ” said Harry. “ All right. Two thirty-five, be it noted.”

The vehicle came to a standstill, and instantly clouds of vapour rose from the horses.

“ Virgil ! ” thought Edwin, gazing at the archway, which filled him with sudden horror, like an obscenity misplaced.

### II

Less than ten minutes later, he and Hilda and Alicia, together with three strange men, stood under the archway. Events had followed one another quickly, to Edwin’s undoing. When the wagonette drew up in the grounds of the Governor’s house, Harry Hesketh had politely indicated that for his horses he preferred the stables of a certain inn down the road to any stables that hospitality might offer ; and he had driven off, Mrs. Rotherwas urging him to return without any delay so that tennis might begin. The Governor had been called from home, and in his absence a high official of the prison was deputed to show the visitors through the establishment. This official was the first of the three strange men ; the other two were visitors. Janet had said that she would not go over the prison, because she meant to play tennis and wished not to tire herself. Alicia said kindly that she at any rate

would go with Hilda,—though she had seen it all before, it was interesting enough to see again.

Edwin had thereupon said that he should remain with Janet. But immediately Mrs. Rotherwas, whose reception of him had been full of the most friendly charm, had shown surprise, if not pain. What,—come to Princetown without inspecting the wonderful prison, when the chance was there? Inconceivable! Edwin might in his blunt Five Towns way have withstood Mrs. Rotherwas, but he could not withstand Hilda, who, frowning, seemed almost ready to risk a public altercation in order to secure his attendance. He had to yield. To make a scene, even a very little one, in the garden full of light dresses and polite suave voices would have been monstrous. He thought of all that he had ever heard of the subjection of men to women. He thought of Johnnie and of Mrs. Chris Hamson, who was known for her steely caprices. And he thought also of Jimmie and of the undesirable Mrs. Jimmie, who, it was said, had threatened to love Jimmie no more unless he took her once a week without fail to the theatre, whatever the piece, and played cards with her and two of her friends on all the other nights of the week. He thought of men as a sex conquered by the unscrupulous and the implacable, and in this mood, superimposed on his mood of disgust at the mere sight of the archway, he followed the high official and his train. Mrs. Rotherwas's last words were that they were not to be long. But the official said privately to the group that they must at any rate approach the precincts of the prison with all ceremony, and he led them proudly, with an air of ownership, round to the main entrance where the wagonette had first stopped.

A turnkey on the other side of the immense gates, using a theatrical gesture, jangled a great bouquet of keys; the portal opened, increasing the pride of the official, and the next moment they were interned in the outer courtyard. The moor and all that it meant lay unattainably beyond that portal. As the group slowly crossed the enclosed space, with the grim façades of yellow-brown buildings on each side and vistas of further gates and buildings in front, the official and the two male visitors began to talk together over the heads of Alicia and Hilda. The women held close to each

other, and the official kept upon them a chivalrous eye ; the two visitors were friends ; Edwin was left out of the social scheme, and lagged somewhat behind, like one who is not wanted but who cannot be abandoned. He walked self-conscious, miserable, resentful, and darkly angry. In one instant the three men had estimated him, decided that he was not of their clan nor of any related clan, and ignored him. Whereas the official and the two male visitors, who had never met before, grew more and more friendly each minute. One said that he did not know So-and-so of the Scots Greys, but he knew his cousin Trevor of the Hussars, who had, in fact, married a niece of his own. And then another question about somebody else was asked, and immediately they were engaged in following clues, as explorers will follow the intricate mouths of a great delta and so unite in the main stream. They were happy.

Edwin did not seriously mind that ; but what he did mind was their accent—in those days termed throughout the Midlands ‘lah-di-dah’ (an onomatopœic description), which, falsifying every vowel sounded in the language, and several consonants, magically created around them an aura of utter superiority to the rest of the world. He quite unreasonably hated them, and he also envied them, because this accent was their native tongue, and because their clothes were not cut like his, and because they were entirely at their ease. Useless for the official to throw him an urbane word now and then ; neither his hate nor his constraint would consent to be alleviated ; the urbane words grew less frequent. Also Edwin despised them because they were seemingly insensible to the tremendous horror of the jail set there like an outrage in the midst of primitive and sane Dartmoor. “ Yes,” their attitude said, “ this is a prison, one of the institutions necessary to the well-being of society, like a workhouse or an opera-house,—an interesting sight ! ”

A second pair of iron gates were opened with the same elaborate theatricality as the first, and while the operation was being done the official, invigorated by the fawning of turnkeys, conversed with Alicia, who during her short married life had acquired some shallow acquaintance with the clans, and he even drew a reluctant phrase from Hilda. Then,



after another open space, came a third pair of iron gates, final and terrific, and at length the party was under cover, and even the sky of the moor was lost. Edwin, bored, disgusted, shamed, and stricken, yielded himself proudly and submissively to the horror of the experience.

## III

Hilda had only one thought—would she catch sight of the innocent prisoner? The party was now deeply engaged in a system of corridors and stairways. The official had said that as the tour of inspection was to be short he would display to them chiefly the modern part of the prison. So far not a prisoner had been seen, and scarcely a warder. The two male visitors were scientifically interested in the question of escapes. Did prisoners ever escape?

“Never!” said the official, with satisfaction.

“Impossible, I suppose. Even when they’re working out on the moor? Warders are pretty good shots, eh?”

“Practically impossible,” said the official. “But there is one way.” He looked up the stairway on whose landing they stood, and down the stairway, and cautiously lowered his voice. “Of course what I tell you is confidential. If one of our Dartmoor fogs came on suddenly, and kind friends outside had hidden a stock of clothes and food in an arranged spot, then theoretically—I say, theoretically—a man might get away. But nobody ever has done.”

“I suppose you still have the silent system?”

The official nodded.

“Absolutely?”

“Absolutely.”

“How awful it must be!” said Alicia, with a nervous laugh.

The official shrugged his shoulders, and the other two males murmured reassuring axioms about discipline.

They emerged from the stairway into a colossal and resounding iron hall. Round the emptiness of this interior ran galleries of perforated iron protected from the abyss by iron balustrades. The group stood on the second of the galleries from the stony floor, and there were two galleries above them. Far away, opposite, a glint of sunshine had feloniously slipped in, transpiercing the gloom, and it lighted

a series of doors. There was a row of these doors along every gallery. Each had a peep-hole, a keyhole, and a number. The longer Hilda regarded, the more nightmarishly numerous seemed the doors. The place was like a huge rabbit-hutch designed for the claustration of countless rabbits. Across the whole width and length of the hall, and at the level of the lowest gallery, was stretched a great net.

"To provide against suicides?" suggested one of the men.

"Yes," said the official.

"A good idea."

When the reverberation of the words had ceased, a little silence ensued. The ear listened vainly for the slightest sound. In the silence the implacability of granite walls and iron reticulations reigned over the accursed vision, stultifying the soul.

"Are these cells occupied?" asked Alicia timidly.

"Not yet, Mrs. Hesketh. It's too soon. A few are."

Hilda thought:

"He may be here,—behind one of those doors." Her heart was liquid with compassion and revolt. "No," she assured herself. "They must have taken him away already. It's impossible he should be here. He's innocent."

"Perhaps you would like to see one of the cells?" the official suggested.

A warder appeared, and, with the inescapable jangle of keys, opened a door. The party entered the cell, ladies first, then the official and his new acquaintances; then Edwin, trailing. The cell was long and narrow, fairly lofty, bluish-white colour, very dimly lighted by a tiny grimed window high up in a wall of extreme thickness. The bed lay next the long wall; except the bed, a stool, a shelf, and some utensils, there was nothing to furnish the horrible nakedness of the cell. One of the visitors picked up an old book from the shelf. It was a Greek Testament. The party seemed astonished at this evidence of culture among prisoners, of the height from which a criminal may have fallen.

The official smiled.

"They often ask for such things on purpose," said he. "They think it's effective. They're very naïve, you know, at bottom."

"This very cell may be his cell," thought Hilda. "He may have been here all these months, years, knowing he was innocent. He may have thought about me in this cell." She glanced cautiously at Edwin, but Edwin would not catch her eye.

They left. On the way to the workshops, they had a glimpse of the old parts of the prison, used during the Napoleonic wars, incredibly dark, frowzy, like catacombs.

"We don't use this part—unless we're very full up," said the official, and he contrasted it with the bright, spacious, healthy excellences of the hall which they had just quitted, to prove that civilization never stood still.

And then suddenly, at the end of a passage, a door opened and they were in the tailors' shop, a large irregular apartment full of a strong stench and of squatted and grotesque human beings. The human beings, for the most part, were clothed in a peculiar brown stuff, covered with broad arrows. The dress consisted of a short jacket, baggy knickerbockers, black stockings, and coloured shoes. Their hair was cut so short that they had the appearance of being bald, and their great ears protruded at a startling angle from the sides of those smooth heads. They were of every age, yet they all looked alike, ridiculous, pantomimic, appalling. Some gazed with indifference at the visitors; others seemed oblivious of the entry. They all stitched on their haunches, in the stench, under the surveillance of eight armed warders in blue.

"How many?" asked the official mechanically.

"Forty-nine, sir," said a warder.

And Hilda searched their loathsome and vapid faces for the face of George Cannon. He was not there. She trembled, —whether with relief or with disappointment she knew not. She was agonized, but in her torture she exulted that she had come.

No comment had been made in the workshop, the official having hinted that silence was usual on such occasions. But in a kind of antechamber—one of those amorphous spaces, serving no purpose and resembling nothing, which are sometimes to be found between definable rooms and corridors in a vast building imperfectly planned—the party halted in the midst of a discussion as to discipline. The male visitors,

except Edwin, showed marked intelligence and detachment ; they seemed to understand immediately how it was that forty-nine ruffians could be trusted to squat on their thighs and stitch industriously and use scissors and other weapons for hours without being chained to the ground ; they certainly knew something of the handling of men. The official, triumphant, stated that every prisoner had the right of personal appeal to the Governor every day.

"They come with their stories of grievances," said he, tolerant and derisive.

"Which often aren't true ? "

"Which are never true," said the official quietly. "Never ! They are always lies—always ! . . . Shows the material we have to deal with ! " He gave a short laugh.

"Really ! " said one of the men, rather pleased and excited by this report of universal lying.

"I suppose," Edwin blurted out, "you can tell for certain when they aren't speaking the truth ? "

Everybody looked at him surprised, as though the dumb had spoken. The official's glance showed some suspicion of sarcasm and a tendency to resent it.

"We can," he answered shortly, commanding his features to a faint smile. "And now I wonder what Mrs. Rotherwas will be saying if I don't restore you to her." It was agreed that regard must be had for Mrs. Rotherwas's hospitable arrangements, though the prison was really very interesting and would repay study.

They entered a wide corridor—one of two that met at right-angles in the amorphous space—leading in the direction of the chief entrance. From the end of this corridor a file of convicts was approaching in charge of two warders with guns. The official offered no remark, but held on. Hilda, falling back near to Edwin in the procession, was divided between a dreadful fear and a hope equally dreadful. Except in the tailors' shop, these were the only prisoners they had seen, and they appeared out of place in the half-freedom of the corridor ; for nobody could conceive a prisoner save in a cell or shop, and these were moving in a public corridor, unshackled.

Then she distinguished George Cannon among them. He

was the third from the last. She knew him by his nose and the shape of his chin, and by his walk, though there was little left of his proud walk in the desolating, hopeless prison-shuffle which was the gait of all six convicts. His hair was iron-grey. All these details she could see and be sure of in the distance of the dim corridor. She no longer had a stomach ; it had gone, and yet she felt a horrible nausea.

She cried out to herself :

“ Why did I come ? Why did I come ? I am always doing these mad things. Edwin was right. Why do I not listen to him ? ”

The party of visitors led by the high official, and the file of convicts in charge of armed warders, were gradually approaching one another in the wide corridor. It seemed to Hilda that a fearful collision was imminent, and that something ought to be done. But nobody among the visitors did anything or seemed to be disturbed. Only they had all fallen silent ; and in the echoing corridor could be heard the firm steps of the male visitors accompanying the delicate tripping of the women, and the military tramp of the warders with the confused shuffling of the convicts.

“ Has he recognized me ? ” thought Hilda wildly.

She hoped that he had and that he had not. She recalled with the most poignant sorrow the few days of their union, their hours of intimacy, his kisses, her secret realization of her power over him, and of his passion. She wanted to scream :

“ That man there is as innocent as any of you, and soon the whole world will know it ! He never committed any crime except of loving me too much. He could not do without me, and so I was his ruin. It is horrible that he should be here in this hell. He must be set free at once. The Home Secretary knows he is innocent, but they are so slow. How can anyone bear that he should stop here one instant longer ? ”

But she made no sound. The tremendous force of an ancient and organized society kept her lips closed and her feet in line with the others. She thought in despair :

“ We are getting nearer, and I cannot meet him. I shall drop.” She glanced at Edwin, as if for help, but Edwin was looking straight ahead.



Then a warder, stopping, ejaculated with the harsh brevity of a drill-sergeant :

“ Halt ! ”

The file halted.

“ Right turn ! ”

The six captives turned, with their faces close against the wall of the corridor, obedient, humiliated, spiritless, limp, stooping. Their backs presented the most ridiculous aspect ; all the calculated grotesquerie of the surpassingly ugly prison uniform was accentuated as they stood thus, a row of living scarecrows, who knew that they had not the right even to look upon free men. Every one of them except George Cannon had large protuberant ears that completed the monstrosity of their appearance.

The official gave his new acquaintances a satisfied glance, as if saying :

“ That is the rule by which we manage these chance encounters.”

The visitors went by in silence, instinctively edging away from the captives. And as she passed, Hilda lurched very heavily against Edwin, and recovered herself. Edwin seized her arm near the shoulder, and saw that she was pale. The others were in front.

Behind them they could hear the warder :

“ Left turn ! March ! ”

And the shuffling and the tramping recommenced.

#### IV

In the garden of the Governor's house tennis had already begun when the official brought back his convoy. Young Truscott and Mrs. Rotherwas were pitted against Harry Hesketh and a girl of eighteen who possessed a good wrist but could not keep her head. Harry was watching over his partner, quietly advising her upon the ruses of the enemy, taking the more difficult strokes for her, and generally imparting to her the quality which she lacked. Harry was fully engaged ; the whole of his brain and body was at strain ; he let nothing go by ; he missed no chance, and within the laws of the game he hesitated at no stratagem. And he was beating young Truscott and Mrs. Rotherwas, while an increasing and

polite audience looked on. To the entering party, the withdrawn scene, lit by sunshine, appeared as perfect as a stage-show, with its trees, lawn, flowers, toilettes, the flying balls, the grace of the players, and the grey solidity of the Governor's house in the background.

Alicia ran gawkily to Janet, who had got a box of chocolates from somewhere, and one of the men followed her, laughing. Hilda sat apart; she was less pale. Edwin remained cautiously near her. He had not left her side since she lurched against him in the corridor. He knew; he had divined that that which he most feared had come to pass,—the supreme punishment of Hilda's morbidity. He had not definitely recognized George Cannon, for he was not acquainted with him, and in the past had only once or twice by chance caught sight of him in the streets of Bursley or Turnhill. But he had seen among the six captives one who might be he, and who certainly had something of the Five Towns look. Hilda's lurch told him that by the vindictiveness of fate George Cannon was close to them.

He had ignored his own emotion. The sudden transient weight of Hilda's body had had a strange moral effect upon him. "This," he thought, "is the burden I have to bear. This, and not lithography, nor riches, is my chief concern. She depends on me. I am all she has to stand by." The burden with its immense and complex responsibilities was sweet to his inmost being; and it braced him and destroyed his resentment against her morbidity. His pity was pure. He felt that he must live more nobly—yes, more heroically—than he had been living; that all irritable pettiness must drop away from him, and that his existence in her regard must have simplicity and grandeur. The sensation of her actual weight stayed with him. He had not spoken to her; he dared not; he had scarcely met her eyes; but he was ready for any emergency. Every now and then, in the garden, Hilda glanced over her shoulder at the house, as though her gaze could pierce the house and see the sinister prison beyond.

The set ended, to Harry Hesketh's satisfaction; and, another set being arranged, he and Mrs. Rotherwas, athletic in a short skirt and simple blouse, came walking, rather flushed and breathless, round the garden with one or two

others, including Harry's late partner. The conversation turned upon the great South Wales colliery strike against a proposed reduction of wages. Mrs. Rotherwas's husband was a colliery proprietor near Monmouth, and she had just received a letter from him. Every one sympathized with her and her husband, and nobody could comprehend the wrong-headedness of the miners, except upon the supposition that they had been led away by mischievous demagogues. As the group approached, the timid young girl, having regained her nerve, was exclaiming with honest indignation: "The leaders ought to be shot, and the men who won't go down the pits ought to be *forced* to go down and *made* to work." And she picked at fluff on her yellow frock. Edwin feared an uprising from Hilda, but naught happened. Mrs. Rotherwas spoke about tea, though it was rather early, and they all, Hilda as well, wandered to a large yew tree under which was a table; through the pendent branches of the tree the tennis could be watched as through a screen.

The prison clock tolled the hour over the roofs of the house, and Mrs. Rotherwas gave the definite signal for refreshments.

"You're exhausted," she said teasingly to Harry.

"You'll see," said Harry.

"No," Mrs. Rotherwas delightfully relented. "You're a dear, and I love to watch you play. I'm sure you could give Mr. Truscott half fifteen."

"Think so?" said Harry, pleased, and very conscious that he was living fully.

"You see what it is to have an object in life, Hesketh," Edwin remarked suddenly.

Harry glanced at him doubtfully, and yet with a certain ingenuous admiration. At the same time a white ball rolled near the tree. He ducked under the trailing branches, returned the ball, and moved slowly towards the court.

"Alicia tells me you're very old friends of theirs," said Mrs. Rotherwas, agreeably, to Hilda.

Hilda smiled quietly.

"Yes, we are, both of us."

Who could have guessed, now, that her condition was not absolutely normal?

"Charming people, aren't they, the Heskeths?" said Mrs.

Rotherwas. "Perfectly charming. They're an ideal couple, And I do like their house, it's so deliciously quaint, isn't it, Mary?"

"Lovely," agreed the young girl.

It was an ideal world, full of ideal beings.

Soon after tea the irresistible magnetism of Alicia's babies drew Alicia off the moor, and with her the champion player, Janet, Hilda, and Edwin. Mrs. Rotherwas let them go with regret, adorably expressed. Harry would have liked to stay, but on the other hand he was delightfully ready to yield to Alicia.

## v

On arriving at Tavy Mansion Hilda announced that she should lie down. She told Edwin, in an exhausted but friendly voice, that she needed only rest, and he comprehended, rightly, that he was to leave her. Not a word was said between them as to the events within the prison. He left her, and spent the time before dinner with Harry Hesketh, who had the idea of occupying their leisure with a short game of bowls, for which it was necessary to remove the croquet hoops.

Hilda undressed and got into bed. Soon afterwards both Alicia, with an infant, and Janet came to see her. Had Janet been alone, Hilda might conceivably in her weakness have surrendered the secret to her in exchange for that soft and persuasive sympathy of which Janet was the mistress, but the presence of Alicia made a confidence impossible, and Hilda was glad. She plausibly fibbed to both sisters, and immediately afterwards the household knew that Hilda would not appear at dinner. There was not the slightest alarm or apprehension, for the affair explained itself in the simplest way,—Hilda had had a headache in the morning, and had been wrong to go out; she was now merely paying for the indiscretion. She would be quite recovered the next day. Alicia whispered a word to her husband, who, besides, was not apt easily to get nervous about anything except his form at games. Edwin also, with his Five Towns habit of mind, soberly belittled the indisposition. The household remained natural and gay. When Edwin went upstairs to prepare for

dinner, moving very quietly, his wife had her face towards the wall and away from the light. He came round the bed to look at her.

"I'm all right," she murmured.

"Want nothing at all?" he asked, with nervous gruffness. She shook her head.

Very impatiently she awaited his departure, exasperated more than she had ever been by his precise deliberation over certain details of his toilet. As soon as he was gone she began to cry; but the tears came so gently from her eyes that the weeping was as passive, as independent of volition, as the escape of blood from a wound.

She had a grievance against Edwin. At the crisis in the prison she had blamed herself for not submitting to his guidance, but now she had reacted against all such accusations, and her grievance amounted to just an indictment of his common sense, his quietude, his talent for keeping out of harm's way, his lack of violent impulses, his formidable respectability. She was a rebel; he was not. He would never do anything wrong, or even perilous. Never, never would he find himself in need of a friend's help. He would always direct his course so that society would protect him. He was a firm part of the structure of society; he was the enemy of impulses. When he foresaw a danger, the danger was always realized; she had noticed that, and she resented it. He was infinitely above the George Cannons of the world. He would be incapable of bigamy, incapable of being caught in circumstances which could bring upon him suspicion of any crime whatever. Yet for her the George Cannons had a quality which he lacked, which he could never possess, and which would have impossibly perfected him—a quality heroic, foolish, martyr-like! She was almost ready to decide that his complete social security was due to cowardice and resulted in self-righteousness! . . . Could he really feel pity as she felt it, for the despised and rejected, and a hatred of injustice equal to hers?

These two emotions were burning her up. Again and again, ceaselessly, her mind ran round the circle of George Cannon's torture and the callousness of society. He had sinned, and she had loathed him; but both his sin and her



loathing were the fruit of passion. He had been a proud man, and she had shared his pride ; now he was broken, unutterably humiliated, and she partook of his humiliation. The grotesque and beaten animal in the corridor was all that society had left of him who had once inspired her to acts of devotion, who could make her blush, and to satisfy whom she would recklessly spend herself. The situation was intolerable, and yet it had to be borne. But surely it must be ended ! Surely at the latest on the morrow the prisoner must be released, and soothed and reinstated ! . . . Pardoned ? No ! A pardon was an insult, worse than an insult. She would not listen to the word. Society might use it for its own purposes ; but she would never use it. Pardon a man after deliberately and fiendishly achieving his ruin ? She could have laughed.

Exhaustion followed, tempering emotion and reducing it to a profound despairing melancholy that was stirred at intervals by frantic revolt. The light failed. The windows became vague silver squares. Outside fowls clucked, a horse's hoof clattered on stones ; servants spoke to each other in their rough, good-natured voices. The peace of the world had its effect on her, unwilling though she was. Then there was a faint tap at the door. She made no reply, and shut her eyes. The door gently opened, and some one tripped delicately in. She heard movements at the washstand. . . . One of the maids. A match was struck. The blinds were stealthily lowered, the curtains drawn ; garments were gathered together, and at last the door closed again.

She opened her eyes. The room was very dimly illuminated. A night-light, under a glass hemisphere of pale rose, stood on the dressing-table. By magic, order had been restored ; a glinting copper ewer of hot water stood in the whiteness of the basin with a towel over it ; the blue blinds, revealed by the narrowness of the red curtains, stirred in the depths of the windows ; each detail of the chamber was gradually disclosed, and the chamber was steeped in the first tranquillity of the night. Not a sound could be heard. Through the depths of her bitterness, there rose slowly the sensation of the beauty of existence even in its sadness. . . .

A long time afterwards it occurred to her in the obscurity

that the bed was tumbled. She must have turned over and over. The bed must be arranged before Edwin came. He had to share it. After all, he had committed no fault ; he was entirely innocent. She and fate between them had inflicted these difficulties and these solitudes upon him. He had said little or nothing, but he was sympathetic. When she had stumbled against him she had felt his upholding masculine strength. He was dependable, and would be dependable to the last. The bed must be creaseless when he came ; this was the least she could do. She arose. Very faintly she could descry her image in the mirror of the great wardrobe—a dishevelled image. Forgetting the bed, she bathed her face, and, unusually, took care to leave the washstand as tidy as the maid had left it. Then having arranged her hair, she set about the bed. It was not easy for one person unaided to make a wide bed. Before she had finished she heard footsteps outside the door. She stood still. Then she heard Edwin's voice :

“ Don't trouble, thanks. I'll take it in myself.”

He entered, carrying a tray, and shut the door, and instantly she busied herself once more with the bed.

“ My poor girl,” he said with quiet kindness, “ what are you doing ? ”

“ I'm just putting the bed to rights,” she answered, and almost with a single movement she slid back into the bed. “ What have you got there ? ”

“ I thought I'd ask for some tea for you,” he said. “ Nearly the whole blessed household wanted to come and see you, but I wouldn't have it.”

She could not say : “ It's very nice of you.” But she said, simply to please him : “ I should like some tea.”

He put the tray on the dressing-table ; then lit three candles, two on the dressing-table and one on the night-table, and brought the tray to the night-table.

He himself poured out the tea, and offered the cup. She raised herself on an elbow.

“ Did you recognize him ? ” she muttered suddenly, after she had blown on the tea to cool it.

Under ordinary conditions Edwin would have replied to such an unprepared question with another, petulant and

impatient : " Recognize who ? " pretending that he did not understand the allusion. But now he made no pretences.

" Not quite," he said. " But I knew at once. I could see which of them it must be."

The subject at last opened between them, Hilda felt an extraordinary solace and relief. He stood by the bedside, in black, with a great breastplate of white, his hair rough, his hands in his pockets. She thought he had a fine face ; she thought of him as, at such a time, her superior ; she wanted powerfully to adopt his attitude, to believe in everything he said. They were talking together in safety, quietly, gravely, amicably, withdrawn and safe in the strange house—he benevolent and assuaging and comprehending, she desiring the balm which he could give. It seemed to her that they had never talked to each other in such tones.

" Isn't it awful—awful ! " she exclaimed.

" It is," said Edwin, and added carefully, tenderly : " I suppose he *is* innocent."

She might have flown at him : " That's just like you—to assume he isn't ! " But she replied :

" I'm quite sure of it. I say—I want you to read all the letters I've had from Mrs. Cannon. I've got them here. They're in my bag there. Read them now. Of course I always meant to show them to you."

" All right," he agreed, drew a chair to the dressing-table where the bag was, found the letters, and read them. She waited, as he read one letter, put it down, read another, laid it precisely upon the first one, with his terrible exactitude and orderliness, and so on through the whole packet.

" Yes," said he at the end, " I should say he's innocent this time, right enough."

" But something ought to be done ! " she cried. " Don't you think something ought to be done, Edwin ? "

" Something has been done. Something is being done."

" But something else ! "

He got up and walked about the room.

" There's only one thing to be done," he said.

He came towards her, and stood over her again, and the candle on the night-table lighted his chin and the space between his eyelashes and his eyebrows. He timidly touched

her hair, caressing it. They were absolutely at their ease together in the intimacy of the bedroom. In her brief relations with George Cannon there had not been time to establish anything like such intimacy. With George Cannon she had always had the tremors of the fawn.

"What is it?"

"Wait. That's all. It's not the slightest use trying to hurry these public departments. You can't do it. You only get annoyed for nothing at all. You can take that from me, my child."

He spoke with such delicate persuasiveness, such an evident desire to be helpful, that Hilda was convinced and grew resigned. It did not occur to her that he had made a tremendous resolve which had raised him above the Edwin she knew. She thought she had hitherto misjudged and underrated him.

"I wanted to explain to you about that ten pounds," she said.

"That's all right—that's all right," said he hastily.

"But I *must* tell you. You saw Mrs. Cannon's letter asking me for money. Well, I borrowed the ten pounds from Janet. So of course I had to pay it back, hadn't I?"

"How is Janet?" he asked in a new, lighter tone.

"She seems to be going on splendidly, don't you think so?"

"Well, then, we'll go home to-morrow."

"Shall we?"

She lifted her arms and he bent. She was crying. In a moment she was sobbing. She gave him violent kisses amid her sobs, and held him close to her until the fit passed. Then she said, in her voice reduced to that of a child:

"What time's the train?"

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE GHOST

#### I

IT was six-thirty. The autumn dusk had already begun to fade ; and in the damp air, cold, grimy, and vaporous, men with scarves round their necks and girls with shawls over their heads, or hatted and even gloved, were going home from work past the petty shops where sweets, tobacco, fried fish, chitterlings, groceries, and novelettes were sold among enamelled advertisements of magic soaps. In the feeble and patchy illumination of the footpaths, which left the middle of the streets and the upper air all obscure, the chilled, preoccupied people passed each other rapidly like phantoms, emerging out of one mystery and disappearing into another. Everywhere, behind the fanlights and shaded windows of cottages, domesticity was preparing the warm relaxations of the night. Amid the streets of little buildings the lithographic establishment, with a yellow oblong here and there illuminated in its dark façades, stood up high, larger than reality, more important and tyrannic, one of the barracks, one of the prisons, one of the money-works where a single man or a small group of men by brains and vigour and rigour exploited the populace.

Edwin, sitting late in his private office behind those façades, was not unaware of the sensation of being an exploiter. By his side on the large flat desk lay a copy of the afternoon's "Signal" containing an account of the breaking up by police of an open-air meeting of confessed anarchists on the previous day at Manchester. Manchester was, and is still, physically and morally, very close to the Five Towns, which respect it more than they respect London. An anarchist meeting at Manchester was indeed an uncomfortable portent for the Five Towns. Enormous strikes, like civil wars at



stalemate, characterized the autumn as they had characterized the spring, affecting directly or indirectly every industry, and weakening the prestige of government, conventions, wealth and success. Edwin was successful. It was because he was successful that he was staying late and that a clerk in the outer office was staying late and that windows were illuminated here and there in the façades. Holding in his hand the wage-book, he glanced down the long column of names and amounts. Some names conveyed nothing to him ; but most of them raised definite images in his mind—of big men, roughs, decent clerks with wristbands, undersized pale machinists, intensely respectable skilled artisans and draughtsmen, thin ragged lads, greasy, slatternly, pale girls, and one or two fat women,—all dirty, and working with indifference in dirt. Most of them kowtowed to him ; some did not ; some scowled askance. But they were all dependent on him. Not one of them but would be prodigiously alarmed and inconvenienced—to say nothing of going hungry—if he did not pay wages the next morning. The fact was he could distribute ruin with a gesture and nobody could bring him to book. . . .

Something wrong ! Under the influence of strikes and anarchist meetings he felt with foreboding and even with a little personal alarm that something was wrong. Those greasy, slatternly girls, for instance, with their coarse charm and their sexuality,—they were underpaid. They received as much as other girls, on potbanks, perhaps more, but they were underpaid. What chance had they ? He was getting richer every day, and safer (except for the vague menace) ; yet he could not appreciably improve their lot, partly for business reasons, partly because any attempt to do so would bring the community about his ears and he would be labelled as a doctrinaire and a fool, and partly because his own common sense was against such a move. Not those girls, not his works, not this industry and that, was wrong. All was wrong. And it was impossible to imagine any future period when all would not be wrong. Perfection was a desolating thought. Nevertheless the struggle towards it was instinctive and had to go on. The danger was (in Edwin's eyes) of letting that particular struggle monopolize one's energy. Well, he

would not let it. He did a little here and a little there, and he voted democratically and in his heart was most destructively sarcastic about toryism ; and for the rest he relished the adventure of existence, and took the best he conscientiously could, and thought pretty well of himself as a lover of his fellow-men. If he was born to be a master, he would be one, and not spend his days in trying to overthrow mastery. He was tired that evening, he had a slight headache, he certainly had worries ; but he was not unhappy on the throbbing, tossing steamer of humanity. Nobody could seem less adventurous than he seemed, with his timidities and his love of moderation, comfort, regularity and security. Yet his nostrils would sniff to the supreme and all-embracing adventure.

He heard Hilda's clear voice in the outer office : " Mr. Clayhanger in there ? " and the clerk's somewhat nervously agitated reply, repeating several times an eager affirmative. And he himself, the master, though still all alone in the sanctum, at once pretended to be very busy.

Her presence would thus often produce an excitation in the organism of the business. She was so foreign to it, so unsoiled by it, so aloof from it, so much more gracious, civilized, enigmatic than anything that the business could show ! And, fundamentally, she was the cause of the business ; it was all for her ; it existed with its dirt, noise, crudity, strain, and eternal effort so that she might exist in her elegance, her disturbing femininity, her restricted and deep affections, her irrational capriciousness, and her strange, brusque common sense. The clerks and some of the women felt this ; Big James certainly felt it ; and Edwin felt it, and denied it to himself, more than anybody. There was no economic justice in the arrangement. She would come in veiled, her face mysterious behind the veil, and after a few minutes she would delicately lift her gloved fingers to the veil, and raise it and her dark, pale, vivacious face would be disclosed. " Here I am ! " And the balance was even, her debt paid ! That was how it was.

In the month that had passed since the visit to Dartmoor, Edwin, despite his resolve to live heroically and philosophically, had sometimes been forced into the secret attitude : " This

woman will kill me, but without her I shouldn't be interested enough to live." He was sometimes morally above her to the point of priggishness, and sometimes incredibly below her; but for the most part living in a different dimension. She had heard nothing further from Mrs. Cannon; she knew nothing of the bigamist's fate, though more than once she had written for news. Her moods were unpredictable and disconcerting, and as her moods constituted the chief object of Edwin's study the effect on him was not tranquillizing. At the start he had risen to the difficulty of the situation; but he could not permanently remain at that height, and the situation had apparently become stationary. His exasperations, both concealed and open, were not merely unworthy of a philosopher, they were unworthy of a common man. "Why be annoyed?" he would say to himself. But he was annoyed. "The tone—the right tone!" he would remind himself. Surely he could remember to command his voice to the right tone? But no! He could not. He could infallibly remember to wind up his watch, but he could not remember that. Moreover, he felt, as he had felt before, on occasions, that no amount of right tone would keep their relations smooth, for the reason that principles were opposed. Could she not see? . . . Well, she could not. There she was, entire, unalterable—impossible to chip inconvenient pieces off her—you must take her or leave her; and she could not see, or she would not—which in practice was the same thing.

And yet some of the most exquisite moments of their union had occurred during that feverish and unquiet month—moments of absolute surrender and devotion on her part, of protective love on his; and also long moments of peace. With the early commencement of autumn, all the family had resumed the pursuit of letters with a certain ardour. A startling feminist writer, and the writer whose parentage and whose very name lay in the Five Towns, who had recreated the East and whose vogue was a passion among the lettered—both these had published books whose success was extreme and genuine. And in the curtained gas-lit drawing-room of a night Hilda would sit rejoicing over the triumphant satire of the woman-novelist, and Edwin and George would

lounge in impossible postures, each mesmerized by a story of the Anglo-Indian ; and between chapters Edwin might rouse himself from the enchantment sufficiently to reflect : " How indescribably agreeable these evenings are ! " And ten to one he would say aloud, with false severity : " George ! Bed ! " And George, a fine judge of genuineness in severity, would murmur carelessly : " All right ! I'm going ! " And not go.

And now Edwin in the office thought :

" She's come to fetch me away."

He was gratified. But he must not seem to be gratified. The sanctity of business from invasion had to be upheld. He frowned, feigning more diligently than ever to be occupied. She came in, with that air at once apologetic and defiant that wives have in affronting the sacred fastness. Nobody could have guessed that she had ever been a business woman, arriving regularly at just such an office every morning, short-hand-writing, twisting a copying-press, filing, making appointments. Nobody could have guessed that she had ever been in business for herself, and had known how sixpence was added to sixpence and a week's profit lost in an hour. All such knowledge had apparently dropped from her like an excrescence, had vanished like a temporary disfigurement, and she looked upon commerce with the uncomprehending, careless, and yet impressed eyes of a young girl.

" Hello, missis ! " he exclaimed casually.

Then George came in. Since the visit to Dartmoor Hilda had much increased her intimacy with George, spending a lot of time with him, walking with him, and exploring in a sisterly and reassuring manner his most private life. George liked it, but it occasionally irked him and he would give a hint to Edwin that mother needed to be handled at times.

" You needn't come in here, George," said Hilda.

" Well, can I go into the engine-house ? " George suggested. Edwin had always expected that he would prefer the machine-room. But the engine-house was his haunt, probably because it was dirty, fiery, and stuffy.

" No, you can't," said Edwin. " Pratt's gone by this, and it's shut up."

" No, it isn't. Pratt's there."

"All right."

"Shut the door, dear," said Hilda.

"Hooray!" George ran off and banged the glass door.

Hilda, glancing by habit at the unsightly details of the deteriorating room, walked round the desk. With apprehension Edwin saw resolve and perturbation in her face. He was about to say: "Look here, infant, I'm supposed to be busy." But he refrained.

Holding out a letter which she nervously snatched from her bag, Hilda said:

"I've just had this—by the afternoon post. Read it."

He recognized at once the sloping handwriting; but the paper was different; it was a mere torn half-sheet of very cheap note-paper. He read:

"DEAR MRS. CLAYHANGER,—Just a line to say that my husband is at last discharged. It has been weary waiting. We are together, and I'm looking after him.—With renewed thanks for your sympathy and help, Believe me, Sincerely yours,  
CHARLOTTE M. CANNON."

The signature was scarcely legible. There was no address, no date.

Edwin's first flitting despicable masculine thought was: "She doesn't say anything about that ten pounds!" It fled. He was happy in an intense relief that affected all his being. He said to himself: "Now that's over, we can begin again."

"Well," he murmured. "That's all right. Didn't I always tell you it would take some time? . . . That's all right."

He gazed at the paper, waving it in his hand as he held it by one corner. He perceived that it was the letter of a jealous woman, who had got what she wanted and meant to hold it, and entirely to herself; and his mood became somewhat sardonic.

"Very curt, isn't it?" said Hilda strangely. "And after all this time, too!"

He looked up at her, turning his head sideways to catch her eyes.



"That letter," he said in a voice as strange as Hilda's, "that letter is exactly what it ought to be. It could not possibly have been better turned. . . . You don't want to keep it, I suppose, do you?"

"No," she muttered.

He tore it into very small pieces, and dropped them into the waste-paper basket beneath the desk.

"And burn all the others," he said, in a low tone.

"Edwin," after a pause.

"Yes?"

"Don't you think George ought to know? Don't you think one of us ought to tell him,—either you or me? You might tell him."

"Tell him what?" Edwin demanded sharply, pushing back his chair.

"Well, everything!"

He glowered. He could feel himself glowering; he could feel the justifiable anger animating him.

"Certainly not!" he enunciated resentfully, masterfully, overpoweringly. "Certainly not!"

"But supposing he hears from outsiders?"

"You needn't begin supposing."

"But he's bound to have to know some time."

"Possibly. But he isn't going to know now, any road! Not with my consent. The thing's absolute madness."

Hilda almost whispered:

"Very well, dear. If you think so."

"I do think so."

He suddenly felt very sorry for her. He was ready to excuse her astounding morbidity as a consequence of extreme spiritual tribulation. He added with brusque good-nature:

"And so will you, in the morning, my child."

"Shall you be long?"

"No. I told you I should be late. If you'll run off, my chuck, I'll undertake to be after you in half an hour."

"Is your headache better?"

"No. On the other hand, it isn't worse."

He gazed fiercely at the wages-book.

She bent down.

"Kiss me," she murmured tearfully.

As he kissed her, and as she pressed against him, he absorbed and understood all the emotions through which she had passed and was passing, and from him to her was transmitted an unimaginable tenderness that shamed and atoned for the inclemency of his refusals. He was very happy. He knew that he would not do another stroke of work that night, but still he must pretend to do some. Playfully, without rising, he drew down her veil, smacked her gently on the back, and indicated the door.

"I have to call at Clara's about that wool for Maggie," she said, with courage. His fingering of her veil had given her extreme pleasure.

"I'll bring the kid up," he said.

"Will you?"

She departed, leaving the door unlatched.

## II

A draught from the outer door swung wide-open the unlatched door of Edwin's room.

"What are doors for?" he muttered, pleasantly impatient; then he called aloud:

"Simpson. Shut the outer door—and this one, too."

There was no answer. He arose and went to the outer office. Hilda had passed through it like an arrow. Simpson was not there. But a man stood leaning against the mantelpiece; he held at full spread a copy of the "Signal," which concealed all the upper part of him except his fingers and the crown of his head. Though the gas had been lighted in the middle of the room, it must have been impossible for him to read by it, since it shone through the paper. He lowered the newspaper with a rustle and looked at Edwin. He was a big, well-dressed man, wearing a dark grey suit, a blue Melton overcoat, and a quite new glossy 'boiler-end' felt hat. He had a straight, prominent nose, and dark, restless eyes, set back; his short hair was getting grey, but not his short black moustache.

"Were you waiting to see me?" Edwin said, in a defensive half-hostile tone. The man might be a belated commercial traveller of a big house—some of those fellows considered

themselves above all laws ; on the other hand, he might be a new customer in a hurry.

"Yes," was the reply, in a deep, full and yet uncertain voice. "The clerk said you couldn't be disturbed, and asked me to wait. Then he went out."

"What can I do for you ? It's really after hours, but some of us are working a bit late."

The man glanced at the outer door, which Edwin was shutting, and then at the inner door, which exposed Edwin's room.

"I'm George Cannon," he said, advancing a step, as it were defiantly.

For an instant Edwin was frightened by the sudden melodrama of the situation. Then he thought :

"I'm up against this man. This is a crisis."

And he became almost agreeably aware of his own being. The man stood close to him, under the gas, with all the enigmatic quality of another being. He could perceive now—at any rate he could believe—that it was George Cannon. Forgetful of what the man had suffered, Edwin felt for him nothing but the instinctive inimical distrust of the individual who has never got at loggerheads with society for the individual who once and for always has. To this feeling was added a powerful resentment of the man's act in coming—especially unannounced—to just *him*, the husband of the woman he had dishonoured. It was a monstrous act—and doubtless an act characteristic of the man. It was what might have been expected. The man might have been innocent of a particular crime, might have been falsely imprisoned ; but what had he originally been doing, with what rascals had he been consorting, that he should be even suspected of crime ? George Cannon's astonishing presence, so suddenly after his release, at the works of Edwin Clayhanger, was unforgivable. Edwin felt an impulse to say savagely :

"Look here. You clear out. You understand English, don't you ? Hook it."

But he had not the brutality to say it. Moreover, the clerk returned, carrying, full to the brim, the tin water-receptacle used for wetting the damping-brush of the copying-press.

"Will you come in, please?" said Edwin curtly. "Simpson, I'm engaged."

The two men went into the inner room.

"Sit down," said Edwin grimly.

George Cannon, with a firm gesture, planted his hat on the flat desk between them. He looked round behind him at the shut glazed door.

"You needn't be afraid," said Edwin. "Nobody can hear—unless you shout."

He gazed curiously but somewhat surreptitiously at George Cannon, trying to decide whether it was possible to see in him a released convict. He decided that it was not possible. George Cannon had a shifty, but not a beaten, look; many men had a shifty look. His hair was somewhat short, but so was the hair of many men, if not of most. He was apparently in fair health; assuredly his constitution had not been ruined. And if his large, coarse features were worn, marked with tiny black spots, and seamed and generally ravaged, they were not more ravaged than the features of numerous citizens of Bursley aged about fifty who saved money, earned honours, and incurred the envy of presumably intelligent persons. And as he realized all this, Edwin's retrospective painful alarm as to what might have happened if Hilda had noticed George Cannon in the outer office lessened until he could dismiss it entirely. By chance she had ignored Cannon, perhaps scarcely seeing him in her preoccupied passage, perhaps taking him vaguely for a customer; but supposing she *had* recognized him, what then? There would have been an awkward scene—nothing more. Awkward scenes do not kill; their effect is transient. Hilda would have had to behave, and would have behaved, with severe common sense. He, Edwin himself, would have handled the affair. A demeanour matter-of-fact and impassible was what was needed. After all, a man recently out of prison was not a wild beast, nor yet a freak. Hundreds of men were coming out of prisons every day. . . . He should know how to deal with this man—not pharisaically, not cruelly, not unkindly, but still with a clear indication to the man of his reprehensible indiscretion in being where he then was.

"Did she recognize me—down there—Dartmoor?" asked

George Cannon, without any preparing of the ground, in a deep, trembling voice ; and as he spoke a flush spread slowly over his dark features.

"Er—yes!" answered Edwin, and his voice also trembled.

"I wasn't sure," said George Cannon. "We were halted before I could see. And I daren't look round—I should ha' been punished. I've been punished before now for looking up at the sky at exercise." He spoke more quickly and then brought himself up with a snort. "However, I've not come all the way here to talk prison, so you needn't be afraid. I'm not one of your reformers."

In his weak but ungoverned nervous excitement, from which a faint trace of hysteria was not absent, he now seemed rather more like an ex-convict, despite his good clothes. He had become, to Edwin's superior self-control, suddenly wistful. And at the same time, the strange opening question, and its accent, had stirred Edwin, and he saw with remorse how much finer had been Hilda's morbid and violent pity than his own harsh common sense and anxiety to avoid emotion. The man in good clothes moved him more than the convict had moved him. He seemed to have received vision, and he saw not merely the unbearable pathos of George Cannon, but the high and heavenly charitableness of Hilda, which he had constantly doused, and his own common earthliness. He was exceedingly humbled. And he also thought, sadly : "This chap's still attached to her. Poor devil!"

"What *have* you come for!" he inquired.

George Cannon cleared his throat. Edwin waited, in fear, for the avowal. He could make nothing out of the visitor's face ; its expression was anxious and drew sympathy, but there was something in it which chilled the sympathy it invoked and which seemed to say : "I shall look after myself." It yielded naught. You could be sorry for the heart within, and yet could neither like nor esteem it. "Punished for looking up at the sky." . . . Glimpses of prison life presented themselves to Edwin's imagination. He saw George Cannon again halted and turning like a serf to the wall of the corridor. And this man opposite to him, close to him in the familiar room, was the same man as the serf!



Was he the same man? . . . Inscrutable, the enigma of that existence whose breathing was faintly audible across the desk.

"You know all about it—about my affair, of course."

"Well," said Edwin, "I expect you know how much I know."

"I'm an honest man—you know that. I needn't begin by explaining that to you."

Edwin nerved himself:

"You weren't honest towards Hilda, if it comes to that."

He used his wife's Christian name, to this man with whom he had never before spoken, naturally, inevitably. He would not say 'my wife.' To have said 'my wife' would somehow have brought some muddiness upon that wife, and by contact upon her husband.

"When I say 'honest' I mean—you know what I mean. About Hilda—I don't defend that. Only I couldn't help myself. . . . I dare say I should do it again." Edwin could feel his eyes smarting and he blinked, and yet he was angry with the man, who went on: "It's no use talking about that. That's over. And I couldn't help it. I had to do it. She's come out of it all right. She's not harmed, and I thank God for it! If there'd been a child living . . . well, it would have been different."

Edwin started. This man didn't know he was a father—and his son was within a few yards of him—might come running in at any moment! (No! Young George would not come in. Nothing but positive orders would get the boy out of the engine-house so long as the engine-man remained there.) Was it possible that Hilda had concealed the existence of her child, or had announced the child's death? If so, she had never done a wiser thing, and such sagacity struck him as heroic. But if Mrs. Cannon knew as to the child, then it was Mrs. Cannon who, with equal prudence and for a different end, had concealed its existence from George Cannon or lied to him as to its death. Certainly the man was sincere. As he said 'Thank God!' his full voice had vibrated like the voice of an ardent religionist at a prayer-meeting.

George Cannon began again:

"All I mean is I'm an honest man. I've been damnably treated. Not that I want to go into that. No! I'm a fatalist. That's over. That's done with. I'm not whining. All I'm insisting on is that I'm not a thief, and I'm not a forger, and I've nothing to hide. Perhaps I brought my difficulties about that bank-note business on myself. But when you've once been in prison, you don't choose your friends—you can't. Perhaps I might have ended by being a thief or a forger, only on this occasion it just happens that I've had a good six years for being innocent. I never did anything wrong, or even silly, except let myself get too fond of somebody. That might happen to anyone. It did happen to me. But there's nothing else. You understand? I never——"

"Yes, yes, certainly!" said Edwin, stopping him as he was about to repeat all the argument afresh. It was a convincing argument.

"No one's got the right to look down on me, I mean," George Cannon insisted, bringing his face forward over the desk. "On the contrary this country owes me an apology. However, I don't want to go into that. That's done with. Spilt milk's spilt. I know what the world is."

"I agree! I agree!" said Edwin.

He did. The honesty of his intelligence admitted almost too eagerly and completely the force of the pleading.

"Well," said George Cannon, "to cut it short, I want help. And I've come to you for it."

"Me!" Edwin feebly exclaimed.

"You, Mr. Clayhanger! I've come straight here from London. I haven't a friend in the whole world, not one. It's not everybody can say that. There was a fellow named Dayson at Turnhill—used to work for me—he'd have done something if he could. But he was too big a fool to be able to; and besides, he's gone, no address. I wrote to him."

"Oh, that chap!" murmured Edwin, trying to find relief in even a momentary turn of the conversation. "I know who you mean. Shorthand-writer. He died in the Isle of Man on his holiday two years ago. It was in the papers."

"That's his address, is it? Good old Dead Letter Office! Well, he is crossed off the list, then; no mistake!" Cannon

snarled bitterly. "I'm aware you're not a friend of mine. I've no claim on you. You don't know me ; but you know about me. When I saw you in Dartmoor I guessed who you were, and I said to myself you looked the sort of man who might help another man. . . . Why did you come into the prison ? Why did you bring her there ? You must have known I was there." He spoke with a sudden change to reproachfulness.

"I didn't bring her there." Edwin blushed. "It was ——— However, we needn't go into that, if you don't mind."

"Was she upset ?"

"Of course."

Cannon sighed.

"What do you want me to do ?" asked Edwin gloomily. In secret he was rather pleased that George Cannon should have deemed him of the sort likely to help. Was it the flattery of a mendicant ? No, he did not think it was. He believed implicitly everything the man was saying.

"Money !" said Cannon sharply. "Money ! You won't feel it, but it will save me. After all, Mr. Clayhanger, there's a bond between us, if it comes to that. There's a bond between us. And you've had all the luck of it."

Again Edwin blushed.

"But surely your wife——" he stammered. "Surely Mrs. Cannon isn't without funds. Of course I know she was temporarily rather short a while back, but surely——"

"How do you know she was short ?" Cannon grimly interrupted.

"My wife sent her ten pounds—I fancy it was ten pounds —towards expenses, you know."

Cannon ejaculated, half to himself, savagely :

"Never told me !"

He remained silent.

"But I've always understood she's a woman of property," Edwin finished.

Cannon put both elbows on the desk, leaned farther forward, and opened his mouth several seconds before speaking.

"Mr. Clayhanger. I've left my wife—as you call her. If I'd stayed with her I should have killed her. I've run off. Yes, I know all she's done for me. I know without her I

might have been in prison to-day and for a couple o' years to come. But I'd sooner be in prison or in hell or anywhere you like than with Mrs. Cannon. She's an old woman. She always was an old woman. She was nearly forty when she hooked me, and I was twenty-two. And I'm young yet. I'm not middle-aged yet. She's got a clear conscience, Mrs. Cannon has. She always does her duty. She'd let me walk over her, she'd never complain, if only she could keep me. She'd just play and smile. Oh, yes, she'd turn the other cheek—and keep on turning it. But she isn't going to have me. And for all she's done I'm not grateful. Hag. That's what she is!" He spoke loudly, excitedly, under considerable emotion.

"Hsh!" Edwin, alarmed, endeavoured gently to soothe him.

"All right! all right!" Cannon proceeded in a lower but still impassioned voice. "But look here! You're a man. You know what's what. You'll understand what I mean. Believe me when I say that I wouldn't live with that woman for eternal salvation. I couldn't. I couldn't do it. I've taken some of her money, only a little, and run off . . ." He paused, and went on with conscious persuasiveness now: "I've just got here. I had to ask your whereabouts. I might have been recognized in the streets, but I haven't been. I didn't expect to find you here at this time. I might have had to sleep in the town to-night. I wouldn't have come to your private house. Now I've seen you I shall get along to Crewe to-night. I shall be safer there. And it's on the way to Liverpool and America. I want to go to America. With a bit o' capital I shall be all right in America. It's my one chance; but it's a good one. But I must have some capital. No use landing in New York with empty pockets."

Said Edwin, still shying at the main issues:

"I was under the impression you had been to America once."

"Yes, that's why I know. I hadn't any money. And what's more," he added with peculiar emphasis, "I was brought back."

Edwin thought:

"I shall yield to this man."

At that instant he saw the shadow of Hilda's head and shoulders on the glass of the door.

"Excuse me a second," he murmured, bounded with astonishing velocity out of the room, and pulled the door to after him with a bang.

## III

Hilda, having observed the strange, excited gesture, paused a moment, in an equally strange tranquillity, before speaking. Edwin fronted her at the very door. Then she said, clearly and deliberately, through her veil :

"Auntie Hamps has had an attack—heart. The doctor says she can't possibly live through the night. It was at Clara's."

This was the first of Mrs. Hamps's fatal heart-attacks.

"Ah!" breathed Edwin, with apparently a purely artistic interest in the affair. "So that's it, is it? Then she's at Clara's?"

"Yes."

"What doctor?"

"I forget his name. Lives in Acre Lane. They sent for the nearest. She can't get her breath—has to fight for it. She jumped out of bed struggling to breathe."

"Have you seen her?"

"Yes. They made me."

"Albert there?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, I suppose I'd better go round. You go back. I'll follow you."

He was conscious of not the slightest feeling of sorrow at the imminent death of Auntie Hamps. Even the image of the old lady fighting to fetch her breath scarcely moved him, though the death-bed of his father had been harrowing enough. He and Hilda had the same thought :—"At last something has happened to Auntie Hamps!" And it gave zest.

"I must speak to you," said Hilda, low, and moved towards the inner door.

The clerk Simpson was behind them at his ink-stained desk, stamping letters, and politely pretending to be deaf.



"No," Edwin stopped her. "There's some one in there. We can't talk there."

"A customer?"

"Yes. . . . I say, Simpson. Have you done those letters?"

"Yes, sir," answered Simpson, smiling. He had been recommended as a 'very superior' youth, and had not disappointed, despite a constitutional nervousness.

"Take them to the pillar, and call at Mr. Benbow's and tell them that I'll be round in about a quarter of an hour. I don't know as you need come back. Hurry up."

"Yes, sir."

Edwin and Hilda watched Simpson go.

"Whatever's the matter?" Hilda demanded in a low, harsh voice, as soon as the outer door had clicked. It was as if something sinister in her had been suddenly released.

"Matter? Nothing. Why?"

"You look so queer."

"Well—you come along with these shocks." He gave a short, awkward laugh. He felt and looked guilty, and he knew that he looked guilty.

"You looked queer when you came out."

"You've upset yourself, my child, that's all." He now realized the high degree of excitement which he himself, without previously being aware of it, had reached.

"Edwin, who is it in there?"

"Don't I tell you—it's a customer."

He could see her nostrils twitching through the veil.

"It's George Cannon in there!" she exclaimed.

He laughed again. "What makes you feel that?" he asked, feeling all the while the complete absurdity of such fencing.

"When I ran out I noticed somebody. He was reading a newspaper and I couldn't see him. But he just moved it a bit, and I seemed to catch sight of the top of his head. And when I got into the street I said to myself, 'It looked like George Cannon,' and then I said, 'Of course it couldn't be.' And then with this business about Auntie Hamps the idea went right out of my head."

"Well, it is, if you want to know."

Her mysterious body and face seemed to radiate a disastrous emotion that filled the whole office.

"Did you know he was coming?"

"I did not. Hadn't the least notion!" The sensation of criminality began to leave Edwin. As Hilda seemed to move and waver, he added:

"Now you aren't going to see him!"

And his voice menacingly challenged her, and defied her to stir a step. The most important thing in the world, then, was that Hilda should not see George Cannon. He would stop her by force. He would let himself get angry and brutal. He would show her that he was the stronger. He had quite abandoned his earlier attitude of unsentimental callousness which argued that, after all, it wouldn't ultimately matter whether they encountered each other or not. Far from that, he was, so it appeared to him, standing between them, desperate and determined, and acting instinctively and conventionally. Their separate pasts, each full of grief and tragedy, converged terribly upon him in an effort to meet in just that moment, and he was ferociously resisting.

"What does he want?"

"He wants me to help him to go to America."

"*You!*"

"He says he hasn't a friend."

"But what about his wife?"

"That's just what I said. . . . He's left her. Says he can't live with her."

There was a silence, in which the tension appreciably lessened.

"Can't live with her! Well, I'm not surprised. But I do think it's strange, him coming to you."

"So do I," said Edwin dryly, taking the upper hand; for the change in Hilda's tone—her almost childlike satisfaction in the news that Cannon would not live with his wife—seemed to endow him with superiority. "But there's a lot of strange things in this world. Now listen here. I'm not going to keep him waiting; I can't." He then spoke very gravely, authoritatively and ominously: "Find George and take him home at once."

Hilda, impressed, gave a frown.

"I think it's very wrong that you should be asked to help him." Her voice shook and nearly broke. "Shall you help him, Edwin?"

"I shall get him out of this town at once, and out of the country. Do as I say. As things are he doesn't know there is any George, and it's just as well he shouldn't. But if he stays anywhere about, he's bound to know."

All Hilda's demeanour admitted that George Cannon had never been allowed to know that he had a son; and the simple candour of the admission frightened Edwin by its very simplicity.

"Now! Off you go! George is in the engine-house."

Hilda moved reluctantly towards the outer door, like a reproved and rebellious schoolgirl. Suddenly she burst into tears, sprang at Edwin, and, putting her arms round his neck, kissed him through the veil.

"Nobody but you would have helped him—in your place!" she murmured passionately, half admiring, half protesting. And with a backward look as she hurried off, her face stern and yet soft seemed to appeal: "Help him."

Edwin was at once deeply happy and impregnated with a sense of the frightful sadness that lurks in the hollows of the world. He stood alone with the flaring gas, overcome.

#### IV

He went back to the private room, self-conscious and rather tongue-tied, with a clear feeling of relief that Hilda was disposed of, removed from the equation—and not unsuccessfully. After the woman, to deal with the man, in the plain language of men, seemed simple and easy. He was astounded, equally, by the grudging tardiness of Mrs. Cannon's information to Hilda as to the release, and by the baffling, inflexible detraction of Hilda's words: "Well, I'm not surprised." And the flitting image of Auntie Hamps fighting for life still left him untouched. He looked at George Cannon, and George Cannon, with his unreliable eyes, looked at him. He almost expected Cannon to say: "Was that Hilda you were talking to out there?" But Cannon seemed to have no suspicion that, in either the inner or the outer room, he had been so close to her. No doubt, when he was waiting by the mantel-

piece in the outer room, he had lifted the paper as soon as he heard the door unlatched, expressly in order to screen himself from observation. Probably he had not even guessed that the passer was woman. Had Simpson been there, the polite young man would doubtless have said: "Good night, Mrs. Clayhanger," but Simpson had happened not to be there.

"Are you going to help me?" asked George Cannon, after a moment, and his heavy voice was so beseeching, so humble, so surprisingly sycophantic, so fearful, that Edwin could scarcely bear to hear it. He hated to hear that one man could be so slavishly dependent on another. Indeed, he much preferred Cannon's defiant, half-bullying tone.

"Yes," said he. "I shall do what I can. What do you want?"

"A hundred pounds," said George Cannon, and, as he named the sum, his glance was hard and steady.

Edwin was startled. But immediately he began to re-adjust his ideas, persuading himself that, after all, the man could not prudently have asked for less.

"I can't give it you all now."

Cannon's face lighted up in relief and joy. His black eyes sparkled feverishly with the impatience of an almost hopeless desire about to be satisfied. Although he did not move, his self-control had for the moment gone completely, and the secrets of his soul were exposed.

"Can you send it me—in notes? I can give you an address in Liverpool." His voice could hardly utter the words.

"Wait a second," said Edwin.

He went to the safe let into the wall, of which he was still so naïvely proud, and unlocked it with the owner's gesture. The perfect fitting of the bright key, the ease with which it turned, the silent, heavy swing of the massive door on its hinges—these things gave him physical as well as moral pleasure. He savoured the security of his position and his ability to rescue people from destruction. From the cavern of the safe he took out a bag of gold, part of the money required for wages on the morrow,—he would have to send to the Bank again in the morning. He knew that the bag contained exactly twenty pounds in half-sovereigns, but he shed the lovely twinkling coins on the desk and counted them.

"Here," he said. "Here's twenty pounds. Take the bag, too—it'll be handier," and he put the money into the bag. Then a foolish, grand idea struck him. "Write down the address on this envelope, will you, and I'll send you a hundred to-morrow. You can rely on it."

"Eighty, you mean," muttered George Cannon.

"No," said Edwin, with affected nonchalance, blushing. "A hundred. The twenty will get you over and you'll have a hundred clear when you arrive on the other side."

"You're very kind," said Cannon weakly. "I——"

"Here. Here's the envelope. Here's a bit of pencil." Edwin stopped him hastily. His fear of being thanked made him harsh.

While Cannon was nervously writing the address, he noticed that the man's clumsy fingers were those of a day-labourer.

"You'll get it all back. You'll see," said Cannon, as he stood up to leave, holding his glossy felt hat in his left hand.

"Don't worry about that. I don't want it. You owe me nothing."

"You'll have every penny back, and before long, too."

Edwin smiled, deprecating the idea.

"Well, good luck!" he said. "You'll get to Crewe all right. There's a train at Shawport at eight-seven."

They shook hands, and quitted the inner office. As he traversed the outer office on his way forth, in front of Edwin, Cannon turned his head, as if to say something, but confused, he said nothing and went on, and at once he disappeared into the darkness outside. And Edwin was left with a memory of his dubious eyes, hard rather than confident, profoundly relieved rather than profoundly grateful.

"By Jove!" Edwin murmured by himself. "Who'd have thought it? . . . They say those chaps always turn up again like bad pennies, but I bet he won't." Simultaneously he reflected upon the case of Mrs. Cannon, deserted; but it did not excite his pity. He fastened the safe, extinguished the lights, shut the office, and prepared his mind for the visit to Auntie Hamps.



## V

Hilda and her son were in the dining-room, in which the table, set for a special meal—half-tea, half-supper—made a glittering oblong of white. On the table, among blue-and-white plates, and knives and forks, lay some of George's shabby schoolbooks. In most branches of knowledge George privately knew that he could instruct his parents—especially his mother. Nevertheless that beloved outgrown creature was still occasionally useful at home-lessons, as for instance in 'poetry.' George, disdainful, had to learn some verses each week, and now his mother held a book entitled "The Poetry Reciter," while George mumbled with imperfect verbal accuracy the apparently immortal lines :

*About Ben Adhem, may his tribe increase,  
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace.*

His mother, however, scarcely regarded the book. She knew the poem by heart, and had indeed recited it to George, who, though he was much impressed by her fire, could not by any means have been persuaded to imitate the freedom of her delivery. His elocution to-night was unusually bad, for the reason that he had been pleasurably excited by the immense news of Auntie Hamps's illness. Not that he had any grudge against Auntie Hamps ! His pleasure would have been as keen in the grave illness of any other important family connection, save his mother and Edwin. Such notable events gave a sensational interest to domestic life which domestic life as a rule lacked.

Then, through the half-open door of the dining-room came the sound of Edwin's latchkey in the front-door.

"There's uncle !" exclaimed George, and jumped up.

Hilda stopped him.

"Put your books together," said she. "You know uncle likes to go up to the bathroom before he does *anything* !"

It was a fact that the precisian hated even to be greeted, on his return home in the evening, until he came downstairs from the bathroom.

Hilda herself collected the books and put them on the sideboard.

"Shall I tell Ada ?" George suggested, champing the bit.

"No. Ada knows."

With deliberation Hilda tended the fire. Her mind was in a state of emotional flux. Memories and comparisons mournfully and yet agreeably animated it. She thought of the days when she used to recite amid enthusiasm in the old drawing-room of the Orgreaves; and of the days when she was a wanderer, had no home, no support, little security; and of the brief uncertain days with George Cannon; and of the eternal days when her only assurance was the assurance of disaster. She glanced at George, and saw in him reminders of his tragic secret father now hidden away, forced into the background, like something obscene. Nearly every development of the present out of the past seemed to her, now, to be tragic. Johnnie Orgreave had, of course, not come back from his idyll with the ripping Mrs. Chris Hamson; their seclusion was not positively known; but the whole district knew that the husband had begun proceedings and that the Orgreave business was being damaged by the incompetence of Jimmie Orgreave, whose deplorable wife had a few days earlier been seen notoriously drunk in the dress-circle of the Hanbridge Theatre Royal. Janet was still at Tavy Mansion because there was no place for her in the Five Towns. Janet had written to Hilda, sadly, and the letter breathed her sense of her own futility and superfluity in the social scheme. In one curt phrase, that very afternoon, the taciturn Maggie, who very seldom complained, had disclosed something of what it was to live day and night with Auntie Hamps. Even Clara, the self-sufficient, protected by an almost impermeable armour of conceit, showed signs of the anxiety due to obscure chronic disease and a husband who financially never knew where he was. Finally, the last glories of Auntie Hamps were sinking to ashes. Only Hilda herself was, from nearly every point of view, in a satisfactory and promising situation. She possessed love, health, money, stability. When danger threatened, a quiet and unfailingly sagacious husband was there to meet and destroy it. Surely nothing whatever worth mentioning, save the fact that she was distantly approaching forty, troubled the existence of Hilda now; and her age certainly did not trouble her.

Ada entered with the hot dishes, and went out.

At length Hilda heard the bathroom door. She left the dining-room, shutting the door on George, who could take a hint very well—considering his years. Edwin, brushed and spruce, was coming downstairs, rubbing his clean hands with physical satisfaction. He nodded amiably, but without smiling.

“Has he gone?” said Hilda, in a low voice.

Edwin nodded. He was at the foot of the stairs.

She did not offer to kiss him, having a notion that he would prefer not to be kissed just then.

“How much did you give him?” She knew he would not care for the question, but she could not help putting it.

He smiled, and touched her shoulder. She liked him to touch her shoulder.

“That’s all right,” he said, with a faint condescension. “Don’t you worry about that.”

She did not press the point. He could be free enough with information—except when it was demanded. Some time later he would begin of his own accord to talk.

“How was Auntie Hamps?”

“Well, if anything, she’s a bit easier. I don’t mind betting she gets over it.”

They went into the dining-room almost side by side, and she inquired again about his headache.

The meal was tranquil. After a few moments Edwin opened the subject of Auntie Hamps’s illness with some sardonic remarks upon the demeanour of Albert Benbow.

“Is Auntie dying?” asked George with gusto.

Edwin replied:

“What are those schoolbooks doing there on the side-board? I thought it was clearly understood that you were to do your lessons in your mother’s boudoir?”

He spoke without annoyance, but coldly. He was aware that neither Hilda nor her son could comprehend that to a bookman schoolbooks were not books, but merely an eyesore. He did not blame them for their incapacity, but he considered that an arrangement was an arrangement.

“Mother put them there,” said the base George.

“Well, you can take them away,” said Edwin firmly. “Run along now.”

George rose from his place between Hilda and Edwin, and from his luscious plate, and removed the books. Hilda watched him meekly go. His father, too, had gone. Edwin was in the right ; his position could not be assailed. He had not been unpleasant, but he had spoken as one sublimely confident that his order would not be challenged. Within her heart Hilda rebelled. If Edwin had been responsible for some act contrary to one of her decrees, she would never in his presence have used the tone that he used to enforce obedience. She would have laughed or she would have frowned, but she would never have been the polite autocrat. Nor would he have expected her to play the rôle ; he would probably have resented it.

Why ? Were they not equals ? No, they were not equals. The fundamental unuttered assumption upon which the household life rested was that they were not equals. She might cross him, she might momentarily defy him, she might torture him, she might drive him to fury, and still be safe from any effective reprisals, because his love for her made her necessary to his being ; but in spite of all that his will remained the seat of government, and she and George were only the Opposition. In the end, she had to incline. She was the complement of his existence, but he was not the complement of hers. She was just a parasite, though an essential parasite. Why ? . . . The reason, she judged, was economic, and solely economic. She rebelled. Was she not as individual, as original, as he ? Had she not a powerful mind of her own, experience of her own, ideals of her own ? Was she not of a nature profoundly and exceptionally independent ? . . .

Her lot was unalterable. She had, of course, not the slightest desire to leave him ; she was devoted to him ; what irked her was that, even had she had the desire, she could not have fulfilled it, for she was too old now, and too enamoured of comfort and security, to risk such an enterprise. She was a captive, and she recalled with a gentle pang, less than regret, the days when she was unhappy and free as a man, when she could say, "I will go to London," "I will leave London," "I am deceived and ruined, but I am my own mistress."

These thoughts in the idyllic tranquillity of the meal, mingled, below her smiling preoccupations of an honoured house-mistress, with the thoughts of her love for her husband and son and of their excellences, of the masculine love which enveloped and shielded her, of her security, of the tragedy of the bribed and dismissed victim and villain, George Cannon, of the sorrows of some of her friends, and of the dead. In her heart was the unquiet whispering : " I submit, and yet I shall never submit."



## BOOK III

### EQUILIBRIUM

#### CHAPTER XVII

#### GEORGE'S EYES

##### I

**H**ILDA sat alone in the boudoir, before the fire. She had just come out of the kitchen, and she was wearing the white uniform of the kitchen, unsuited for a boudoir ; but she wore it with piquancy. The November afternoon had passed into dusk, and through the window, over the roofs of Hulton Street, stars could be seen in the darkening clear sky. After a very sharp fall and rise of the barometer, accounting for heavy rain-storms, the first frosts were announced, and winter was on the doorstep. The hardy inhabitants of the Five Towns, Hilda among them, were bracing themselves to the discipline of winter, with its mud, increased smuts, sleet, and damp, piercing chills ; and they were taking pleasure in the tonic prospect of discomfort. The visitation had threatened ever since September. Now it had positively come. Let it come ! Build up the fire, stamp the feet, and defy it ! Hilda was exhilarated, having been re-awakened to the zest and the romance of life, not merely by the onset of winter, but by dramatic events in the kitchen.

A little over three years had elapsed since the closing of the episode of George Cannon, and for two of those years Hilda had had peace in the kitchen. She had been the firm mistress who knows what she wants, and, knowing also how to handle the peculiar inmates of the kitchen, gets it ; she had been the mistress who " won't put up with " all sorts of things, including middle-age and ugliness in servants, and whom heaven has spoilt by too much favour. Then the

cook, with the ingratitude of a cherished domestic, had fallen in love and carried her passion into a cottage miles away at Longshaw. And from that moment Hilda had ceased to be the mistress who by firmness commands fate ; she had become as other mistresses. In a year she had had five cooks, giving varying degrees of intense dissatisfaction. She had even dismissed the slim and constant Ada once, but, yielding to an outburst of penitent affection, had withdrawn the notice. The last cook, far removed from youthfulness or prettiness, had left suddenly that day, after insolence, after the discovery of secret beer and other vileness in the attic-bedroom, after a scene in which Hilda had absolutely silenced her, reducing ribaldry to sobs. Cook and trunk expelled, Hilda had gone about the house like a fumigation, and into the kitchen like the embodiment of calm and gay efficiency. She would do the cooking herself. She would show the kitchen that she was dependent upon nobody. She had quickened the speed of Ada, accused her ' tartly,' but not without dry good-humour, of a disloyal secretiveness, and counselled her to mind what she was about if she wanted to get on in the world.

Edwin knew nothing, for all had happened since his departure to the works after midday dinner. He would be back in due course, and George would be back, and Tertius Ingpen (long ago reconciled) was coming for the evening. She would show them all three what a meal was, and incidentally Ada would learn what a meal was. There was nothing like demonstrating to servants that you could beat them easily at their own game.

She had just lived through her thirty-ninth birthday. "Forty!" she had murmured to herself with a shiver of apprehension, meaning that the next would be the fortieth. It was an unpleasant experience. She had told Edwin not to mention her birthday abroad. Clumsy George had inquired: "Mother, how old are you?" To which she had replied, "Lay-ours for meddlers!" a familiar phrase whose origin none of them understood, but George knew that it signified, "Mind your own business." No! She had not been happy on that birthday. She had gazed into the glass and decided that she looked old, that she did not look old,

that she looked old, endlessly alternating. She was not stout, but her body was solid, too solid ; it had no litheness, none whatever ; it was absolutely set ; the cleft under the chin was quite undeniable, and the olive complexion subtly ravaged. Still, not a hair of her dark head had changed colour. It was perhaps her soul that was greying. Her married life was fairly calm. It had grown monotonous in ease and tranquillity. The sharp, respectful admiration for her husband roused in her by his handling of the Cannon episode, had gradually been dulled. She had nothing against him. Yet she had everything against him, because apart from his grave abiding love for her, he possessed an object and interest in life, and because she was a mere complement and he was not. She had asked herself the most dreadful of questions : " Why have I lived ? Why do I go on living ? " and had answered : " Because of *them*," meaning Edwin and her son. But it was not enough for her, who had once been violently enterprising, pugnacious, endangered, and independent. For after she had watched over them she had energy to spare, and such energy was not being employed and could not be employed. Reading—a diversion ! Fancy work—a detestable device for killing time and energy ! Social duties—ditto ! Charity—hateful ! She had slowly descended into marriage as into a lotus valley. And more than half her life was gone. She could never detect that any other married woman in the town felt as she felt. She could never explain herself to Edwin, and indeed had not tried to explain herself.

Now the affair of the alcoholic cook, aided by winter's first fillip, stimulated and brightened her. And while thinking with a glance at the clock of the precise moment when she must return to the kitchen and put a dish down to the fire, she also thought, rather hopefully and then quite hopefully, about the future of her marriage. Her brain seemed to straighten and correct itself, like the brain of one who, waking up in the morning, slowly perceives that the middle-of-the-night apprehensiveness about eventualities was all awry in its pessimism. She saw that everything could and must be improved, that the new life must begin. Edwin needed to be inspired ; she must inspire him. He slouched

more and more in his walk ; he was more and more absorbed in his business, quieter in the evenings, more impatient in the mornings. Moreover, the household machine had been getting slack. A general tonic was required ; she would administer it—and to herself also. They should all feel the invigorating ozone that very night. She would organize social distractions ; on behalf of the home she would reclaim from the works those odd hours and half-hours of Edwin's which it had imperceptibly filched. She would have some new clothes, and she would send Edwin to the tailor's. She would make him buy a dogcart and a horse. Oh ! She could do it. She had the mastery of him in many things when she chose to be aroused. In a word she would ' branch out.'

She was not sure that she would not prosecute a campaign for putting Edwin on the Town Council, where he certainly out to be. It was his duty to take a share in public matters, and ultimately to dominate the town. Suggestions had already been made by wire-pullers, and unreflectively repulsed by the too casual Edwin. She saw him mayor, and herself mayoress. Once, the prospect of any such formal honour, with all that it entailed of ceremoniousness and insincere civilities, would have annoyed if not frightened her. But now she thought, proudly and timidly and desirously, that she would make as good a mayoress as most mayoresses, and that she could set one or two of them an example in tact and dignity. Why not ? Of late neither mayors nor mayoresses in the Five Towns had been what they used to be. The grand tradition was apparently in abeyance, the people who ought to carry it on seeming somehow to despise it. She could remember mayors, especially Chief Bailiffs at Turnhill, who imposed themselves upon the imagination of the town. But nowadays the name of a mayor was never a household word. She had even heard Ingpen ask Edwin : " See, who is the new mayor ? " and Edwin start his halting answer : " Let me see——"

And she had still another and perhaps a greater ambition—to possess a country house. In her fancy her country house was very like Alicia Hesketh's house, Tavy Mansion, which she had never ceased to envy. She felt that in a new home,

spacious, with space around it, she could really commence the new life. She saw the place perfectly appointed and functioning perfectly—no bother about smuts on white curtains ; no half-trained servants ; none of the base, confined promiscuity of filthy Trafalgar Road ; and the Benbows and Auntie Hamps at least eight or ten miles off ! She saw herself driving Edwin to the station in the morning, or perhaps right into Bursley if she wanted to shop. . . . No, she would of course shop at Oldcastle. . . . She would leave old Darius Clayhanger's miracle-house without one regret. And in the new life she would be always active, busy, dignified, elegant, influential, and kind. And to Edwin she would be absolutely indispensable.

In these imaginings their solid but tarnished love glittered and gleamed again. She saw naught but the charming side of Edwin and the romantic side of their union. She was persuaded that there really was nobody like Edwin, and that no marriage had ever had quite the mysterious, secretly exciting quality of hers. She yearned for him to come home at once, to appear magically in the dusk of the doorway. The mood was marvellous.

II

The door opened.

"Can I speak to you, m'm ?"

It was the voice of Ada, somewhat perturbed. She advanced a little and stood darkly in front of the open doorway.

"What is it, Ada ?" Hilda asked curtly, without turning to look at her.

"It's——" Ada began and stopped.

Hilda glanced round quickly, recognizing now in the voice a peculiar note with which experience had familiarized her. It was a note between pertness and the beginning of a sob, and it always indicated that Ada was feeling more acutely than usual the vast injustice of the worldly scheme. It might develop into tears ; on the other hand it might develop into mere insolence. Hilda discerned that Ada was wearing neither cap nor apron. She thought : "If this stupid girl wants trouble, she has come to me at exactly and precisely the right moment to get it. I'm not in the humour, after



all I've gone through to-day, to stand any nonsense either from her or from anybody else."

"What is it, Ada?" she repeated, with restraint, and yet warningly. "And where's your apron and your cap?"

"In the kitchen, m'm."

"Well, go and put them on, and then come and say what you have to say," said Hilda, thinking: "I don't give any importance to her cap and apron, but she does."

"I was thinking I'd better give ye notice, m'm," said Ada, and she said it pertly, ignoring the command.

The two women were alone together in the house. Each felt it; each felt the large dark emptiness of the house behind them, and the solid front and back doors cutting them off from succour; each had to depend entirely upon herself.

Hilda asked quietly:

"What's the matter now?"

She knew that Ada's grievance would prove to be silly. The girl had practically no common sense. Not one servant girl in a hundred had any appreciable common sense. And when girls happened to be 'upset'—as they were all liable to be, and as Ada by the violent departure of the cook no doubt was—even such minute traces of gumption as they possessed were apt to disappear.

"There's no pleasing you, m'm!" said Ada. "The way you talked to me in the kitchen, saying I was always a-hiding things from ye. I've felt it very much!"

She threw her head back, and the gesture signified: "I'm younger than you, and young men are always running after me. And I can get a new situation any time. And I've *not* gone back into my kitchen to put my cap and apron on."

"Ada," said Hilda. "Shall I tell you what's wrong with you? You're a little fool. You know you're talking right-down nonsense. You know that as well as I do. And you know you'll never get a better place than you have here. But you've taken an idea into your head—and there you are! Now do be sensible. You say you think you'd better give notice. Think it over before you do anything ridiculous. Sleep on it. We'll see how you feel in the morning."

"I think I'd better give notice, m'm, especially seeing I'm a fool, and silly," Ada persisted.

Hilda sighed. Her voice hardened slightly :

"So you'd leave me without a maid just at Christmas ! And that's all the thanks I get for all I've done for you."

"Well, m'm, we've had such a queer lot of girls here lately, haven't we ?" The pertness was intensified. "I don't hardly care to stay. I feel we sh'd both be better for a change like."

It was perhaps Ada's subtly insolent use of the words 'we' and 'both' that definitely brought about a new phase of the interview. Hilda suddenly lost all desire for an amicable examination of the crisis.

"Very well, Ada," she said shortly. "But remember I shan't take you back again, whatever happens."

Ada moved away, and then returned.

"Could I leave at once, m'm, same as cook ?"

Hilda was astonished and outraged, despite all her experience and its resulting secret sardonic cynicism in regard to servants. The girl was ready to walk out instantly.

"And may I inquire where you'd go to ?" asked Hilda with a sneer. "At this time of night you couldn't possibly get home to your parents."

"Oh," answered Ada brightly. "I could go to me cousin's up at Toft End. And her could send down a lad with a barrow for me box."

The plot, then, had been thought out. "Her cousin's !" thought Hilda, and seemed to be putting her finger on the cause of Ada's disloyalty. "Her cousin's !" It was a light in a dark mystery. "Her cousin's !"

"I suppose you know you're forfeiting the wages due to you the day after to-morrow ?"

"I shall ask me cousin about that, m'm," said Ada, as it were menacingly.

"I should !" Hilda sarcastically agreed. "I certainly should." And she thought with bitter resignation : "She'll have to leave anyhow after this. She may as well leave on the spot."

"There's those as'll see as I have me rights," said Ada pugnaciously, with another toss of the head.

Hilda had a mind to retort in anger ; but she controlled herself. Already that afternoon she had imperilled her

dignity in the altercation with the cook. The cook, however, had not Ada's ready tongue, and, while the mistress had come off best against the cook, she might through impulsiveness find herself worsted by Ada's more youthful impudence, were it once unloosed.

"That will do then, Ada," she said. "You can go and pack your box first thing."

In less than three-quarters of an hour Ada was gone, and her corded trunk lay just within the scullery door, waiting the arrival of the cousin's barrow. She had bumped it down the stairs herself.

All solitary in the house, which had somehow been transformed into a strange and unusual house, Hilda wept. She had only parted with an unfaithful and ungrateful servant, but she wept. She dashed into the kitchen and began to do Ada's work, still weeping, and she was savage against her own tears; yet they continued softly to fall, misting her vision of fire and utensils and earthenware vessels. Ada had left everything in a moment; she had left the kettle on the fire, and the grease in the square tin in which the dinner-joint had been cooked, and the ashes in the fender, and tea-leaves in the kitchen teapot and a cup and saucer unwashed. She had cared naught for the inconvenience she was causing; had shown not the slightest consideration; had walked off without a pang, smilingly hoity-toity. And all servants were like that. Such conduct might be due as much to want of imagination, to a simple inability to picture to themselves the consequences of certain acts, as to stark ingratitude; but the consequences remained the same; and Hilda held fiercely to the theory of stark ingratitude.

She had made Ada; she had created her. When Hilda engaged her, Ada was little more than an 'oat-cake girl,'—that is to say, one of those girls who earn a few pence by delivering oat-cakes fresh from the stove at a halfpenny each before breakfast at the houses of gormandizing superior artisans and the middle-classes. True, she had been in one situation prior to Hilda's, but it was a situation where she learnt nothing and could have learnt nothing. Nevertheless, she was very quick to learn, and in a month Hilda had done wonders with her. She had taught her not only her duties,

but how to respect herself, to make the best of herself, and favourably to impress others. She had enormously increased Ada's value in the universe. And she had taught her some worldly wisdom, and permitted and even encouraged certain coquetries, and in the bedroom during dressings and undressings had occasionally treated her as a soubrette if not as a confidante; had listened to her at length, and had gone so far as to ask her views on this matter or that—the supreme honour for a menial. Also she had very conscientiously nursed her in sickness. She had really liked Ada, and had developed a sentimental weakness for her. She had taken pleasure in her prettiness, in her natural grace, and in her crude youth. She enjoyed seeing Ada arrange a bedroom, or answer the door, or serve a meal. And Ada's stupidity—that half-cunning stupidity of her class, which immovably underlay her superficial aptitudes—had not sufficed to spoil her affection for the girl. She had been indulgent to Ada's stupidity; she had occasionally in some soft moods hoped that it was curable. And she had argued in moments of discouragement that at any rate stupidity could be faithful. In her heart she had counted Ada as a friend, as a true standby in the more or less tragic emergencies of the household. And now Ada had deserted her. Stupidity had proved to be neither faithful nor grateful. Why had Ada been so silly and so base? Impossible to say! A nothing! A whim! Nerves! Fatuity! The whole affair was horribly absurd. These creatures were incalculable.

Of course Hilda would have been wiser not to upbraid her so soon after the scene with the cook, and to have spoken more smoothly to the chit in the boudoir. Hilda admitted that. But what then? Was that an excuse for the chit's turpitude? There must be a limit to the mistress's humouring. And probably after all the chit had meant to go. . . . If she had not meant to go she would not have entered the boudoir apronless and capless. Some rankling word, some ridiculous sympathy with the cook, some wild dream of a Christmas holiday—who could tell what might have influenced her? Hilda gave it up—and returned to it a thousand times. One truth emerged—and it was the great truth of house-mistresses—namely, that it never, never, never pays

to be too kind to servants. "Servants do not understand kindness." You think they do; they themselves think they do; but they don't,—they don't and they don't. Hilda went back into the immensity of her desolating experience as an employer of female domestic servants of all kinds, but chiefly bad—for the landlady of a small boarding-house must take what servants she can get—and she raged at the persistence of the proof that kindness never paid. What did pay was severity and inhuman strictness, and the maintenance of an impassable gulf between employer and employed. Not again would she make the mistake which she had made a hundred times. She hardened herself to the consistency of a slave-driver. And all the time it was the woman in her, not the mistress, that the hasty thoughtless Ada had wounded. To the woman the kitchen was not the same place without Ada—Ada on whom she had utterly relied in the dilemma caused by the departure of the cook. As with angrily wet eyes she went about her new work in the kitchen, she could almost see the graceful ghost of Ada tripping to and fro therein.

And all that the world, and the husband, would know or understand was that a cook had been turned out for drunkenness, and that a quite sober parlourmaid had most preposterously walked after her. Hilda was aware that in Edwin she had a severe, though a taciturn critic, of her activities as employer of servants. She had no hope whatever of his sympathy, and so she closed all her gates against him. She waited for him as for an adversary, and all the lustre faded from her conception of their love.

### III

When Edwin approached his home that frosty evening, he was disturbed to perceive that there was no light from the hall-gas shining through the panes of the front-door, though some light showed at the dining-room window, the blinds of which had not been drawn. "What next?" he thought crossly. He was tired, and the keenness of the weather, instead of bracing him, merely made him petulant. He was astonished that several women in a house could all forget such an important act as the lighting of the hall-gas at nightfall. Never before had the hall-gas been forgotten,



and the negligence appeared to Edwin as absolutely monstrous. The effect of it on the street, the effect on a possible caller, was bad enough (Edwin while pretending to scorn social opinion, was really very deferential towards it), but what was worse was the revelation of the feminine mentality.

In opening the door with his latchkey he was purposely noisy, partly in order to give expression to his justified annoyance, and partly to warn all peccant women that the male had arrived, threatening.

As his feet fumbled into the interior gloom and he banged the door, he quite expected a rush of at least one apologetic woman with a box of matches. But nobody came. Nevertheless he could hear sharp movements through the half-open door of the kitchen. Assuredly women had the irresponsibility of infants. He glanced for an instant into the dining-room; the white cloth was laid, but the table was actually not set. With unusual righteous care he wiped the half-congealed mud off his boots on the mat; then removed his hat and his overcoat, took a large new piece of india-rubber from his pocket and put it on the hall-table, felt the radiator (which despite all his injunctions and recommendations was almost cold), and lastly he lighted the gas himself. This final act was contrary to his own rule, for he had often told Hilda that half her trouble with servants arose through her impatiently doing herself things which they had omitted, instead of ringing the bell and seeing the things done. But he was not infrequently inconsistent, both in deed and in thought. For another example, he would say superiorly that a woman could never manage women, ignoring that he the all-wise had never been able to manage Hilda.

He turned to go upstairs. At the same moment somebody emerged obscurely from the kitchen. It was Hilda, in a white apron.

"Oh! I'm glad you've lighted it," said she curtly, without the least symptom of apology, but rather affrontingly.

He continued his way.

"Have you seen anything of George?" she asked, and her tone stopped him.

Yet she well knew that he hated to be stopped of an evening on his way to the bathroom. It could not be sufficiently

emphasized that to accost him before he had descended from the bathroom was to transgress one of the most solemn rules of his daily life.

"Of course I haven't seen George," he answered. "How should I have seen George?"

"Because he's not back from school yet, and I can't help wondering——"

She was worrying about George as usual.

He grunted and passed on.

"There's no light on the landing, either," he said, over the banisters. "I wish you'd see to those servants of yours."

"As it happens there aren't any servants."

Her tone, getting more peculiar with each phrase, stopped him again.

"Aren't any servants? What d'you mean?"

"Well, I found the attic full of beer bottles, so I sent her off on the spot."

"Sent who off?"

"Eliza."

"And where's Ada?"

"She's gone too," said Hilda defiantly, and as though rebutting an accusation before it could be made.

"Why?"

"She seemed to want to. And she was very impertinent over it."

He snorted and shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it's your affair," he muttered, too scornful to ask details.

"It is," said she, significantly laconic.

In the bathroom, vexed and gloomy as he brushed his nails and splashed in the wash-basin, he mused savagely over the servant problem. The servant problem had been growing acute. He had predicted several times that a crisis would arrive; a crisis had arrived; he was always right; his rightness was positively uncanny. He had liked Ada; he had not disliked the cook. He knew that Hilda was to blame. How should she not be to blame,—losing her entire staff in one afternoon? It was not merely that she lacked the gift of authoritative control,—it was also that she had no feeling for democratic justice as between one human being

and another. And yet among his earliest recollections of her was her passionate sympathy with men on strike as against their employers. Totally misleading manifestations! For her a servant was nothing but a 'servant.' She was convinced that all her servants were pampered and spoilt; and as for Edwin's treatment of his workpeople she considered it to be ridiculously, criminally soft. If she had implied once she had implied a hundred times that the whole lot of them laughed at him behind his back for a sentimental simpleton. Occasionally Edwin was quite outraged by her callousness. The topic of the eight-hour day, of the ten-hour day, and even of the twelve-hour day (the last for tramwaymen) had been lately exciting the district. And Edwin was distressed that in his own house a sixteen-hour day for labour was in vogue and that the employer perceived no shame in it. He did not clearly see how the shame was to be abolished, but he thought that it ought to be admitted. It was not admitted. From six in the morning until ten at night these mysterious light-headed young women were the slaves of a bell. They had no surcease except one long weekday evening each week and a short Sunday evening each fortnight. At one period Hilda had had a fad for getting them out of bed at half-past five, to cure them of laziness. He remembered one cook whose family lived at the village of Brindley Edge, five miles off. This cook on her weekday evening would walk to Brindley Edge, spend three-quarters of an hour in her home, and walk back to Bursley, reaching Trafalgar Road just in time to get to bed. Hilda saw nothing very odd in that. She said the girl could always please herself about going to Brindley Edge.

Edwin's democratic sense was gradually growing in force; it disturbed more and more the peace of his inmost mind. He seldom displayed his sympathies (save to Tertius Ingpen, who, though a Tory, was in some ways astoundingly open to ideas, which seemed to interest him as a pretty equation would interest him), but they pursued their secret activity in his being, annoying him at his lithographic works, and still more in his home. He would suppress them, and grin, and repeat his ancient consoling truth that what was, was. The relief, however, was not permanent.

In that year the discovery of Röntgen Rays, the practical invention of the incandescent gas-mantle, the abolition of the man with the red flag in front of self-propelled vehicles, and the fact that Consols stood at 113, had combined to produce in innumerable hearts the illusion that civilization was advancing at a great rate. But Edwin in his soul scarcely thought so. He was worrying not only about Liberal principles, but about the world; in his youth he had never worried about the world. And of his own personal success he would ask and ask: Is it right? He said to himself in the bathroom: "There's a million domestic servants in this blessed country, and not one of them works less than a hundred hours a week, and nobody cares. I don't think I really care myself. But there it is all the same!" And he was darkly resentful against Hilda on account of the entire phenomenon. . . . He foresaw, too, a period of upset and discomfort in his house. Would there, indeed, ever be any real tranquillity in his house, with that strange, primeval cave-woman in charge of it?

As he descended the stairs, Hilda came out of the dining-room with an empty tray.

She said:

"I wish you'd go out and look for George."

Imagine it—going out into the Five Towns to look for one boy!

"Oh! He'll be all right! I suppose you haven't forgotten Ingpen's coming to-night?"

"Of course I haven't. But I want you to go out and look for George."

He knew what was in her mind,—namely, an absurd vision of George and his new bicycle crushed under a tramcar somewhere between Bleakridge and Hanbridge. In that year everybody with any pretension to youthfulness and modernity rode a bicycle. Both Edwin and Hilda rode occasionally—such was the power of fashion. Maternal apprehensions had not sufficed to keep George from having a bicycle, nor from riding on it unprotected up and down the greasy slopes of Trafalgar Road to and from school. Edwin himself had bought the bicycle, pooh-poohing danger, and asserting that anyhow normal risks must always be accepted with an even

mind. He was about to declare that he would certainly not do anything so silly as to go out and look for George,—and then all of a sudden he had the queer sensation of being alone with Hilda in the house made strange and romantic by a domestic calamity. He gazed at Hilda with her apron, and the calamity had made her strange and romantic also. He was vexed, annoyed, despondent, gloomy, fearful of the immediate future; he had immense grievances; he hated Hilda, he loathed giving way to her. He thought: "What is it binds me to this incomprehensible woman? I will not be bound!" But he felt that he would be compelled (not by her but by something in himself) to commit the folly of going out to look for George. And he felt that though his existence was an exasperating adventure, still it was an adventure.

"Oh! Damn!" he exploded, and reached for a cap.

And then George came into the hall through the kitchen. The boy often preferred to enter by the back, the stalking Indian way.

#### IV

George wore spectacles. He had grown considerably. He was now between fourteen and fifteen years of age, and he had begun to look his age. His mental outlook and conversation were on the whole in advance of his age. Even when he was younger he had frequently an adult manner of wise talking, but it had appeared unreal, naïve,—it was amusing rather than convincing. Now he imposed himself even on his family as a genuine adolescent, though the idiom he employed was often schoolboyish and his gestures were immaturely rough. The fact was he was not the same boy. Everybody noticed it. His old charm and delicacy seemed to have gone, and his voice was going. He had become harsh, defiant, somewhat brutal, and egotistic if not conceited. He held a very low opinion of all his schoolfellows, and did not conceal it. Yet he was not very high in his form (the lower fifth); his reports were mediocre; and he cut no figure in the playfield. In the home he was charged with idleness, selfishness, and irresolution. It was pointed out to him that he was not making the best of his gifts, and that if he only



chose to make the best of them he might easily, etc., etc. Apparently he did not care a bit. He had marked facility on the piano, but he had insisted on giving up his piano lessons and would not open the piano for a fortnight at a time. He still maintained his intention of being an architect, but he had ceased to show any interest in architecture. He would, however, still paint in water-colours; and he read a lot but gluttonously, without taste. Edwin and Hilda, and especially Hilda, did not hide their discontent. Hilda had outbursts against him. In regard to Hilda he was disobedient. Edwin always spoke quietly to him, and was seldom seriously disobeyed. When disobeyed Edwin would show a taciturn resentment against the boy, who would sulk and then melt.

"Oh! He'll grow out of it," Edwin would say to Hilda, yet Edwin, like Hilda, thought that the boy was deliberately naughty, and they held themselves towards him as grieved persons of superior righteousness towards a person of inferior righteousness. Not even Edwin reflected that profound molecular changes might be proceeding in George's brain, for which changes he was in no way responsible. Nevertheless, despite the blighting disappointment of George's evolution, the home was by no means deeply engloomed. No! George had an appealing smile, a mere gawky boyishness, a peculiar way of existing, that somehow made joy in the home. Also he was a centre of intense and continual interest, and of this he was very well aware.

In passing through the kitchen George had of course been struck by the astounding absence of the cook; he had noticed further a fancy apron and a cap lying on the window-sill therein. And when he came into the hall, the strange aspect of his mother (in a servant's apron) and his uncle proved to him that something marvellously unusual, exciting, and uplifting was afoot. He was pleased, agog, and he had the additional satisfaction that great events would conveniently divert attention from his lateness. Still he must be discreet, for the adults were evidently at loggerheads, and therefore touchy. He slipped between Edwin and Hilda with a fairly good imitation of innocent casualness, as if saying: "Whatever has occurred, I am guiltless, and going on just as usual."

"Ooh! Bags I!" he exclaimed loudly, at the hall-table,

and seized the india-rubber, which Edwin had promised for him. His school vocabulary comprised an extraordinary number of words endings in *gs*. He would never, for example, say 'first,' but 'foggs'; and never 'second,' but 'seggs.' That very morning, for example, meeting Hilda on the mat at the foot of the stairs, he had shocked her by saying: "You go up foggs, mother, and I'll go seggs."

"George!" Hilda severely protested. Her anxiety concerning him was now turned into resentment. "Have you had an accident?"

"An accident?" said George, as though at a loss. Yet he knew perfectly that his mother was referring to the bicycle.

Edwin said curtly:

"Now, don't play the fool. Have you fallen off your bike? Look at your overcoat. Don't leave that satchel there, and hang your coat up properly."

The overcoat was in a grievous state. A few days earlier it had been new. Besides money, it had cost an enormous amount of deliberation and discussion, like everything else connected with George. Against his will, Edwin himself had been compelled to conduct George to Shillitoe's, the tailor's, and superintend a third trying-on, for further alterations, after the overcoat was supposed to be finished. And lo, now it had no quality left but warmth! Efforts in regard to George were always thus out of proportion to the trifling results obtained. At George's age Edwin doubtless had an overcoat, but he positively could not remember having one, and he was quite sure that no schoolboy overcoat of his had ever preoccupied a whole household for two minutes, to say nothing of a week.

George's face expressed a sense of injury, and hardened.

"Mother made me take my overcoat. You know I can't cycle in my overcoat. I've not been on my bicycle all day. Also my lamp's broken," he said, with gloomy defiance.

His curiosity about wondrous events in the house was quenched.

And Edwin felt angry with Hilda for having quite unjustifiably assumed that George had gone to school on his bicycle. Ought she not to have had the ordinary gumption to assure herself, before worrying, that the lad's bicycle was

not in the shed? Incredible thoughtlessness. All these alarms for nothing!

"Then why are you so late?" Hilda demanded, diverting to George her indignation at Edwin's unuttered but yet conveyed criticism of herself.

"Kept in."

"All this time?" Hilda questioned, suspiciously.

George sullenly nodded.

"What for?"

"Latin."

"Homework? Again?" ejaculated Edwin. "Why hadn't you done it properly?"

"I had a headache last night. And I've got one to-day."

"Another of your Latin headaches!" said Edwin sarcastically. There was nothing, except possibly cod-liver oil, that George detested more than Edwin's serious sarcasm.

The elders glanced at one another and glanced away. Both had the same fear—the dreadful fear that George might be developing the worse characteristics of his father. Both had vividly in mind the fact that this boy was the son of George Cannon. They never mentioned to each other either the fear or the fact; they dared not. But each knew the thoughts of the other. The boy was undoubtedly crafty; he could conceal subtle designs under a simple exterior; he was also undoubtedly secretive. The recent changes in his disposition had put Edwin and Hilda on their guard, and every time young George displayed cunning, or economized the truth, or lied, the fear visited them. "I hope he'll turn out all right!" Hilda had said once. Edwin had nearly replied: "What are you worrying about? The sons of honest men are often rascals. Why on earth shouldn't the son of a rascal be an honest man?" But he had only said, with good-humoured impatience: "Of course he'll turn out all right!" Not that he himself was convinced.

Edwin now attacked the boy gloomily:

"You didn't seem to have much of a headache when you came in just now."

It was true.

But George suddenly burst into tears. His headaches were absolutely genuine. The emptiness of the kitchen and

the general queer look of things in the house had, however, by their promise of adventurous happenings, caused him to forget his headache altogether, and the discovery of the new india-rubber had been like a tonic to a convalescent. The menacing attitude of the elders had now brought about a relapse. The headache established itself as his chief physical sensation. His chief moral sensation was that of a terrible grievance. He did not often cry; he had not indeed cried for about a year. But to-night there was something nervous in the very air, and the sob took him unawares. The first sob having prostrated all resistance, others followed victoriously, and there was no stopping them. He did not quite know why he should have been more liable to cry on this particular occasion than on certain others, and he was rather ashamed; on the other hand, it was with an almost malicious satisfaction that he perceived the troubling effect of his tears on the elders. They were obviously in a quandary. Serve them right!

"It's my eyes," he blubbered. "I told you these specs would never suit me. But you wouldn't believe me, and the head master won't believe me."

The discovery that George's eyesight was defective, about two months earlier, had led to a desperate but of course hopeless struggle on his part against the wearing of spectacles. It was curious that in the struggle he had never even mentioned his strongest objection to spectacles,—namely, the fact that Bert Benbow wore spectacles.

"Why didn't you tell us?" Edwin demanded.

Between sobs George replied with overwhelming disillusioned disgust:

"What's the good of telling you anything? You only think I'm 'coddling.'"

And he passed upstairs, apparently the broken victim of fate and parents, but in reality triumphant. His triumph was such that neither Edwin nor Hilda dared even to protest against the use of such an inexcusable word as 'coddling.'

Hilda went into the kitchen, and Edwin rather aimlessly followed her. He felt incompetent. He could do nothing except carry trays, and he had no desire to carry trays. Neither spoke. Hilda was bending over the fire, then she

arranged the grid in front of the fire to hold a tin, and she greased the tin. He thought she looked very wistful, for all the somewhat bitter sturdiness of her demeanour. Tertius Ingpen was due for the evening; she had no servants—through her own fault; and now a new phase had arrived in the unending responsibility for George's welfare. He knew that she was blaming him on account of George. He knew that she believed in the sincerity of George's outburst; he believed in it himself. The spectacles were wrong; the headache was genuine. And he, Edwin, was guilty of the spectacles because he had forced Hilda, by his calm bantering common sense, to consult a small local optician of good reputation. Hilda had wanted to go to Birmingham or Manchester; but Edwin said that such an idea was absurd. The best local optician was good enough for the great majority of the inhabitants of the Five Towns and would be good enough for George. Why not indeed? Why the craze for specialists? There could be nothing uniquely wrong with the boy's eyes,—it was a temporary weakness. And so on and so on, in accordance with Edwin's instinct for denying the existence of a crisis. And the local optician consulted, had borne him out. The local optician said that every year he dealt with dozens of cases similar to George's. And now both the local optician and Edwin were overthrown by a boy's sobbing tears.

Suddenly Hilda turned round upon her husband.

"I shall take George to London to-morrow about his eyes," she said, with immense purpose and sincerity, in a kind of fierce challenge.

This was her amends to George for having often disbelieved him, and for having suspected him of taking after his father. She made her amends passionately, and with all the force of her temperament. In her eyes George was now a martyr.

"To London?" exclaimed Edwin weakly.

"Yes. It's no use half doing these things. I shall ask Charlie Orgreave to recommend me a first-class oculist."

Edwin dared say nothing. Either Manchester or Birmingham would have been just as good as London, perhaps better. Moreover, she had not even consulted him. She had decided by a violent impulse and announced her decision.



This was not right ; she would have protested against a similar act by Edwin. But he could not argue with her. She was far beyond argument.

" I wouldn't have that boy's eyesight played with for anything ! " she said fiercely.

" Well, of course you wouldn't ! Who would ? " Edwin thought, but he did not say it.

" Go and see what he's doing," she said.

Edwin slouched off. He was no longer the master of the house. He was only an economic factor and general tool in the house. And as he wandered like a culprit up the stairs of the mysteriously transformed dwelling he thought again : " What is it that binds me to her ? " But he was abashed, and in spite of himself impressed by the intensity of Hilda's formidable emotion. Nevertheless, as he began vaguely to perceive all that was involved in her threat to go to London on the morrow, he stiffened, and said to himself : " We shall see about that. We shall just see about that ! "

## V

They were at the meal. Hilda had covered George's portion of fish with a plate and put it before the fire to keep warm. She was just returning to the table. Tertius Ingpen, who sat with his back to the fire, looked at her over his shoulder with an admiring smile and said :

" Well, I've had some good meals in this house, but this is certainly the best bit of fish I ever tasted. So that the catastrophe in the kitchen leaves me unmoved."

Hilda, with face suddenly transformed by a responsive smile, insinuated herself between the table and her arm-chair, drew forward the chair by its arms, and sat down. Her keen pleasure in the compliment was obvious. Edwin noted that the meal was really very well served, the table brighter than usual, the toast crisper, and the fish—a fine piece of hake white as snow within its browned exterior—merely perfect. There was no doubt that Hilda could be extremely efficient when she desired ; Edwin's criticism was that she was too often negligent, and that in her moods of conscientiousness she gave herself too urgently and completely, producing an unnecessary disturbance in the atmosphere of

the home. Nevertheless Edwin, too, felt pleasure in the compliment to Hilda ; and he calmly enjoyed the spectacle of his wife and his friend side by side on such mutually appreciative terms. The intimacy of the illuminated table in the midst of the darker room, the warmth and crackling of the fire, the grave solidity of the furniture, the springiness of the thick carpet, and the delicate odours of the repast,—all these things satisfied in him something that was profound. And the two mature, vivacious, intelligent faces under the shaded gas excited his loyal affection.

“That’s right,” Hilda murmured, in her clear enunciation.

“I do like praise !”

“Now then, you callous brute,” said Ingpen to Edwin.

“What do you say ?”

And Hilda cried with swift, complaining sincerity :

“Oh ! Edwin never praises me !”

Her sincerity convinced by its very artlessness. The complaint had come unsought from her heart. And it was so spontaneous and forcible that Tertius Ingpen, as a tactful guest, saw the advisability of easing the situation by laughter.

“Yes, I do !” Edwin protested, and though he was shocked, he laughed, in obedience to Ingpen’s cue. It was true ; he did praise her ; but not frequently, and almost always in order to flatter her rather than to express his own emotion. Edwin did not care for praising people ; he would enthusiastically praise a book, but not a human being. His way was to take efficiency for granted. “Not so bad,” was a superlative of laudation with him. He was now shocked as much by the girl’s outrageous candour as by the indisputable revelation that she went hungry for praise. Even to a close friend such as Ingpen, surely a wife had not the right to be quite so desperately sincere. Edwin considered that in the presence of a third person husband and wife should always at any cost maintain the convention of perfect conjugal amenity. He knew couples who achieved the feat, Albert and Clara, for example. But Hilda, he surmised, had other ideas, if indeed she had ever consciously reflected upon this branch of social demeanour. Certainly she seemed at moments to lose all regard for appearances.

Moreover, she was polluting by acerbity the pure friendliness of the atmosphere, and endangering cheer.

"He's too wrapped up in the works to think about praising his wife," Hilda continued, still in the disconcerting vein of sincerity, but with less violence and a more philosophical air. The fact was that, although she had not regained the zest of the mood so rudely dissipated by the scene with Ada, she was kept cheerful by the mere successful exercise of her own energy in proving to these two men that servants were not in the least essential to the continuance of plenary comfort in her house; and she somewhat condescended towards Edwin.

"By the way, Teddie," said Ingpen, pulling lightly at his short beard, "I heard a rumour that you were going to stand for the Town Council in the South Ward. Why didn't you?"

Edwin looked a little confused.

"Who told you that tale?"

"It was about."

"It never came from me," said Edwin.

Hilda broke in eagerly:

"He was invited to stand. But he wouldn't. I thought he ought to. I begged him to. But no, he wouldn't. And did you know he refused a J.P.-ship too?"

"Oh!" mumbled Edwin. "That sort o' thing's not my line."

"Oh, isn't it?" Ingpen exclaimed. "Then whose line is it?"

"Look at all the rotters in the Council!" said Edwin.

"All the more reason why you should be on it!"

"Well, I've got no time," Edwin finished gloomily and uneasily.

Ingpen paused, tapping his teeth with his finger, before proceeding, in a judicial, thoughtful manner, which in recent years he had been developing:

"I'll tell you what's the matter with you, old man. You don't know it, but you're in a groove. You go about like a shuttle from the house to the works and the works to the house. And you never think beyond the works and the house."

"Oh, don't I?"

Ingpen went placidly on:

"No, you don't. You've become a good specimen of the genus 'domesticated business man.' You've forgotten what life is. You fancy you're at full stretch all the time, but you're in a coma. I suppose you'll never see forty again—and have you ever been outside this island? You went to Llandudno this year because you went last year. And you'll go next year because you went this year. If you happen now and then to worry about the failure of your confounded Liberal Party you think you're a blooming broad-minded publicist. Where are your musical evenings? When I asked you to go with me to a concert at Manchester last week but one, you thought I'd gone dotty, simply because it meant your leaving the works early and not getting to bed until the unheard-of time of one-thirty a.m."

"I was never told anything about any concert," Hilda interjected sharply.

"Go on! Go on!" said Edwin, raising his eyebrows.

"I will," said Ingpen with tranquillity, as though discussing impartially and impersonally the conduct of some individual at the Antipodes. "Where am I? Well, you're always buying books, and I believe you reckon yourself a bit of a reader. What d'you get out of them? I dare say you've got decided views on the transcendent question whether Emily Brontë was a greater writer than Charlotte. That's about what you've got. Why, dash it, you haven't a vice left. A vice would interfere with your lovely litho. There's only one thing that would upset you more than a machinery breakdown at the works——"

"And what's that?"

"What's that? If one of the hinges of your garden-gate came off, or you lost your latchkey! Why, just look how you've evidently been struck all of a heap by this servant affair! I expect it occurred to you your breakfast might be five minutes late in the morning."

"Stuff!" said Edwin amiably. He regarded Ingpen's observations as fantastically unjust and beside the mark. But his sense of fairness and his admiration of the man's intellectual honesty would not allow him to resent them.

Ingpen would discuss and dissect either his friends or himself with equal detachment ; the detachment was complete. And his assumption that his friends fully shared his own dispassionate, curious interest in arriving at the truth appealed very strongly to Edwin's loyalty. That Ingpen was liable to preach and even to hector was a drawback which he silently accepted.

"Struck all of a heap indeed!" muttered Edwin.

"Wasn't he, Hilda?"

"I should just say he was! And I know he thinks it's all my fault," said Hilda.

Tertius Ingpen glanced at her an instant, and gave a short half-cynical laugh, which scarcely concealed his mild scorn of her feminine confusion of the argument.

"It's the usual thing!" said Ingpen, with scorn still more marked. At this stage of a dissertation he was inclined to be less a human being than the trumpet of a sacred message. "It's the usual thing! I never knew a happy marriage yet that didn't end in the same way." Then, perceiving that he was growing too earnest, and that his emphasis on the phrase 'happy marriage' had possibly been too sarcastic, he sniggered.

"I really don't see what marriage has to do with it," said Hilda, frowning.

"No, of course you don't," Ingpen agreed.

"If you'd said business——" she added.

"Now we've had the diagnosis," Edwin sardonically remarked, looking at his plate, "what's the prescription?" He was reflecting: "'Happy marriage,' does he call it! . . . Why on earth does she say I think it's all her fault? I've not breathed a word."

"Well," replied Ingpen. "You live much too close to your infernal works. Why don't you get away, right away, and live out in the country like a sensible man, instead of sticking in this filthy hole—among all these new cottages? . . . Barbarian hordes. . ."

"Oh! Hurrah!" cried Hilda. "At last I've got somebody who takes my side."

"Of course you say it's impossible. You naturally would——" Ingpen resumed.



He was interrupted by the entrance of George. Soon after Tertius Ingpen's arrival, George had been dispatched to summon urgently Mrs. Tams, the charwoman who had already more than once helped to fill a hiatus between two cooks. George showed now no trace of his late martyrdom, nor of a headache. To conquer George in these latter days you had to demand of him a service. It was Edwin who had first discovered the intensity of the boy's desire to take a useful share in any adult operation whatever. He came in red-cheeked, red-handed, rough, defiant, shy, proud, and making a low intermittent "Oo-oo" noise with protruding lips to indicate the sharpness of the frost outside. As he had already greeted Ingpen he was able to go without ceremony straight to his chair.

Confidentially, in the silence, Hilda raised her eyebrows to him interrogatively. In reply he gave one short nod. Thus in two scarcely perceptible gestures the assurance was asked for and given that the mission had been successful, and that Mrs. Tams would be coming up at once. George loved these private and laconic signallings, which produced in him the illusion that he was getting nearer to the enigma of life.

As he persisted in the "Oo-oo" manifestation, Hilda amicably murmured:

"Hsh-hsh!"

George pressed his lips swiftly and hermetically together, and raised his eyebrows in protest against his own indecorum. He glanced at his empty place; whereupon Hilda glanced informingly in the direction of the fire, and George, skilled in the interpretation of minute signs, skirted stealthily round the table behind his mother's chair, and snatched his loaded plate from the hearth.

Nobody said a word. The sudden stoppage of the conversation had indeed caused a slight awkwardness among the elders. George, for his part, was quite convinced that they had been discussing his eyesight.

"Furnace all right again, sonny?" asked Edwin, quietly, when the boy had sat down. Hilda was replenishing Ingpen's plate.

"Blorp!" muttered George, springing up aghast. This

meant that he had forgotten the furnace in the cellar, source of heat to the radiator in the hall. By a recent arrangement he received sixpence a week for stoking the furnace.

"Never mind! It'll do afterwards," said Edwin.

But George, masticating fish, shook his head. He must be stern with himself, possibly to atone for his tears. And he went off instantly to the cellar.

"Bit chill," observed Edwin to him as he left the room. 'A bit chilly' was what he meant; but George delighted to chip the end off a word, and when Edwin chose to adopt the same practice, the boy took it as a masonic sign of profound understanding between them.

George nodded and vanished. And both Edwin and Hilda dwelt in secret upon his boyish charm, and affectionate satisfaction mingled with and softened their apprehensions and their brooding responsibility and remorse. They thought: "He is simply exquisite," and in their hearts apologized to him.

Tertius Ingpen asked suddenly.

"What's happened to the young man's spectacles?"

"They don't suit him," said Hilda eagerly. "They don't suit him at all. They give him headaches. Edwin would have me take him to the local man, what's-his-name at Hanbridge. I was afraid it would be risky, but Edwin would have it. I'm going to take him to London to-morrow. He's been having headaches for some time and never said a word. I only found it out by accident."

"Surely," Ingpen smiled, "it's contrary to George's usual practice to hide his troubles like that, isn't it?"

"Oh!" said Hilda. "He's rather secretive, you know."

"I've never noticed," said Ingpen, "that he was more secretive than most of us are about a grievance."

Edwin, secretly agitated, said in a curious light tone:

"If you ask me, he kept it quiet just to pay us out."

"Pay you out? What for?"

"For making him wear spectacles at all. These kids want a deuce of a lot of understanding; but that's my contribution. He simply said to himself: 'Well, if they think they're going to cure my eyesight for me with their beastly specs they just aren't, and I won't tell 'em!'"

"Edwin!" Hilda protested warmly, "I wonder you can talk like that!"

Tertius Ingpen went off into one of his peculiar long fits of laughter; and Edwin quizzically smiled, feeling as if he was repaying Hilda for her unnecessary insistence upon the fact that he was responsible for the choosing of an optician. Hilda, suspecting that the two men saw something droll which was hidden from her, blushed and then laughed in turn, somewhat self-consciously.

"Don't *you* think it's best to go to London, about an affair like eyesight?" she asked Ingpen pointedly.

"The chief thing in these cases," said Ingpen solemnly, "is to satisfy the maternal instinct. Yes, I should certainly go to London. If Teddie disagrees, I'm against him. Who are you going to?"

"You are horrid!" Hilda exclaimed, and added with positiveness: "I shall ask Charlie Orgreave first. He'll tell me the best man."

"You seem to have a great belief in Charlie," said Ingpen.

"I have," said Hilda, who had seen Charlie at George's bedside when nobody knew whether George would live or die.

And while they were talking about Charlie and about Janet, who was now living with her brother at Ealing, the sounds of George stoking the furnace below came dully up through the floorboards.

"If you and George are going away," asked Ingpen, "what'll happen to his worship—with not a servant in the house?"

This important point had been occupying Edwin's mind ever since Hilda had first announced her intention to go to London. But he had not mentioned it to her, nor she to him, their relations being rather delicate. It had, for him, only an academic interest, since he had determined that she should not go to London on the morrow. Nevertheless he awaited anxiously the reply.

Hilda answered with composure:

"I'm hoping he'll come with us."

He had been prepared for anything but this. The proposition was monstrously impossible. Could a man leave his works at a moment's notice? The notion was utterly absurd.

"That's quite out of the question," he said at once. He was absolutely sincere. The effect of Ingpen's discourse was, however, such as to upset the assured dignity of his pronouncement; for the decision was simply an illustration of Ingpen's theory concerning him. He blushed.

"Why is it out of the question?" demanded Hilda, inimically gazing at him.

She had lost her lenient attitude towards him of the afternoon. Nevertheless, reflecting upon Tertius Ingpen's indictment of the usual happy marriage, she had been planning the expedition to London as a revival of romance in their lives. She saw it as a marvellous rejuvenating experience. When she thought of all that she had suffered and all that Edwin had suffered, in order that they might come together, she was quite desolated by the prosaic flatness of the ultimate result. Was it to attain their present stolid existence that they had endured affliction for a decade? She wanted passionately to break the mysterious bonds that held them both back from ecstasy and romance. And he would not help her. He would not enter into her desire. She had known that he would refuse. He refused everything—he was so set in his own way. Resentment radiated from her.

"I can't," said Edwin. "What d'you want to go to-morrow for? What does a day or two matter?"

Then she loosed her tongue. Why to-morrow? Because you couldn't trifle with a child's eyesight. Already the thing had been dragging on for goodness knew how long. Every day might be of importance. And why not to-morrow? They could shut the house up, and go off together and stay at Charlie's. Hadn't Janet asked them many a time? Maggie would look out for new servants. And Mrs. Tams would clean the house. It was really the best way out of the servant question too, beside being the best for George.

"And there's another thing," she went on without a pause, speaking rapidly and clearly. "Your eyes want seeing to as well. Do you think I don't know?" she sneered.

"Mine!" he exclaimed. "My eyes are as right as rain." It was not true. His eyes had been troubling him.

"Then why have you had a double candle-bracket fixed

at your bed-head, when a single one's been enough for you all these years?" she demanded.

"I just thought of it, that's all," said Edwin glumly, and with no attempt to be diplomatic. "Anyhow I can't go to London to-morrow. And when I want an oculist," he finished with grimness, "Hanbridge'll be good enough for me, I'm thinking."

Strange, she had never before said a word to him about his eyes!

"Then what *shall* you do while I'm away?" she asked implacably.

But if she was implacable, he also could be implacable. If she insisted on leaving him in the lurch,—well, she should leave him in the lurch! Tertius Ingpen was witness of a plain breach between them. It was unfortunate; it was wholly Hilda's fault; but he had to face the fact.

"I don't know," he replied curtly.

The next moment George returned.

"Hasn't Mrs. Tams been quick, mother?" said George. "She's come."

## VI

In the drawing-room, after the meal, Edwin could hear through the half-open door the sounds of conversation between Hilda and Mrs. Tams, with an occasional word from George, who was going to help Mrs. Tams to 'put the things away,' after she had washed and wiped. The voice of Mrs. Tams was very gentle and comforting. Edwin's indignant pity went out to her. Why should Mrs. Tams thus cheerfully bear the misfortunes of others? Why should she at a moment's notice leave a cottageful of young children and a husband liable at any time to get drunk and maim either them or her, in order to meet a crisis caused by Hilda's impulsiveness and lack of tact? The answer, as in so many cases, was of course economic. Mrs. Tams could not afford not to be at Mrs. Clayhanger's instant call; also she was born the victim of her own altruism; her soul was soft like her plump, cushionlike body, and she lived as naturally in injustice as a fish in water. But could anything excuse those who took advantage of such an economic system, and such a



devoted nature? Edwin's conscience uneasily stirred; he could have blushed. However, he was helpless; and he was basely glad that he was helpless, that it was no affair of his after all, and that Mrs. Tams had thus to work out her destiny to his own benefit. He saw in her a seraph for the next world, and yet in this world he contentedly felt himself her superior. And her voice, soothing, acquiescent, expressive of the spirit which gathers in extraneous woes as the mediaeval saint drew to his breast the swords of the executioners, continued to murmur in the hall.

Edwin thought:

"I alone in this house feel the real significance of Mrs. Tams. I'm sure she doesn't feel it herself."

But these reflections were only the vague unimportant background to the great matter in his mind,—the difficulty with Hilda. When he had entered the house, questions of gaslight and blinds were enormous to him. The immense general question of servants had diminished them to a trifle. Then the question of George's headache and eyesight had taken precedence. And now the relations of husband and wife were mightily paramount over everything else. Tertius Ingpen, having as usual opened the piano, was idly diverting himself with strange chords, while cigarette smoke rose into his eyes, making him blink. Like Edwin, Ingpen was a little self-conscious after the open trouble in the dining-room. It would have been absurd to pretend that trouble did not exist; on the other hand, the trouble was not of the kind that could be referred to, by even a very intimate friend. The acknowledgment of it had to be mute. But in addition to being self-conscious, Ingpen was also triumphant. There was a peculiar sardonic and somewhat disdainful look on his face as he mused over the chords, trying to keep the cigarette smoke out of his eyes. His oblique glance seemed to be saying to Edwin: "What have I always told you about women? Well, you've married, and you must take the consequences. Your wife's no worse than other wives. Here am I, free! And wouldn't you like to be in my place, my boy! . . . How wise I have been!"

Edwin resented these unspoken observations. The contrast between Ingpen's specious support and flattery of Hilda

when she was present, and his sardonic glance when she was absent, was altogether too marked. Himself in revolt against the institution of marriage, Edwin could not bear that Ingpen should attack it. Edwin had, so far as concerned the outside world, taken the institution of marriage under his protection. Moreover, Ingpen's glance was a criticism of Hilda such as no husband ought to permit. And it was also a criticism of the husband—that slave and dupe! . . . Yet, at bottom what Edwin resented was Ingpen's contemptuous pity for the slave and the dupe.

"Why London—and why to-morrow?" said Edwin cheerfully, with a superior philosophical air, as though impartially studying an argumentative position, as though he could regard the temporary vagaries of an otherwise fine sensible woman with bland detachment. He said it because he was obliged to say something, in order to prove that he was neither a slave nor a dupe.

"Ask me another," replied Ingpen curtly, continuing to produce chords.

"Well, we shall see," said Edwin mysteriously, firmly, and loftily; meaning that, if his opinion were invited, his opinion would be that Hilda would not go away to-morrow and that whenever she went she would not go to London.

He had decided to have a grand altercation with his wife that night, when Ingpen and Mrs. Tams had departed, and George was asleep and they had the house to themselves. He knew his ground and he could force a decisive battle. He felt no doubt as to the result. The news of his triumph should reach Ingpen.

Ingpen was apparently about to take up the conversation when George came clumsily and noisily into the drawing-room. All his charm seemed to have left him.

"I thought you were going to help," said Edwin.

"So I am," George challenged him; and, lacking the courage to stop at that point, added: "But they aren't ready yet."

"Let's try those Haydn bits, George," Ingpen suggested.

"Oh, no!" said George curtly.

Ingpen and the boy had begun to play easy fragments of duets together.

Edwin said with sternness :

" Sit down to that piano and do as Mr. Ingpen asks you."

George flushed and looked foolish and sat down ; and Ingpen quizzed him. All three knew well that Edwin's fierceness was only one among sundry consequences of the mood of the house-mistress. The slow movement and the scherzo from the symphony were played. And while the music went on, Edwin heard distinctly the opening and shutting of the front-door and an arrival in the hall, and then chattering. Maggie had called. " What's she after ? " thought Edwin.

" Hoo ! There's Auntie Maggie ! " George exclaimed, as soon as the scherzo was finished, and ran off.

" That boy is really musical," said Ingpen with conviction.

" Yes, I suppose he is," Edwin agreed casually, as though deprecating a talent which however was undeniable. " But you'd never guess he's got a bad headache, would you ? "

It was a strange kind of social evening and Hilda—it seemed to the august Edwin—had a strange notion of the duties of hostess. Surely, if Mrs. Tams was in the kitchen, Hilda ought to be in the drawing-room with their guest ! Surely Maggie ought to have been brought into the drawing-room,—she was not a schoolgirl, she was a woman of over forty, and yet she had quite inexcusably kept her ancient awkwardness and timidities. He could hear chatterings from the dining-room, scurryings through the hall, and chatterings from the kitchen ; then a smash of crockery, a slight scream, and girlish giggings. They were all the same, all the women he knew, except perhaps Clara,—they had hours when they seemed to forget that they were adult and that their skirts were long. And how was it that Hilda and Maggie were suddenly so intimate, they whose discreet mutual jealousy was an undeniable phenomenon of the family life ? With all his majesty he was simpleton enough never to have understood that two women who eternally suspect each other may yet dissolve upon occasion into the most touching playful tenderness. The whole ground-floor was full of the rumour of an apparent alliance between Hilda and Maggie. And as he listened Edwin glanced sternly at the columns of the

evening "Signal," while Tertius Ingpen, absorbed, worked his way bravely through a sonata of Beethoven.

Then George reappeared.

"Mother's going to take me to London to-morrow about my eyes," said George to Ingpen, stopping the sonata by his mere sense of the terrific importance of such tidings. And he proceeded to describe the projected doings in London, the visit to Charlie and Janet Orgreave, and possibly to the Egyptian Hall.

Edwin did not move. He kept an admirable and complete calm under the blow. Hilda was decided, then, to defy him. In telling the boy, who during the meal had been permitted to learn nothing, she had burnt her boats; she had even burnt Edwin's boats also; which seemed to be contrary to the rules laid down by society for conjugal warfare,—but women never could fight according to rules! The difficulties and dangers of the great pitched battle which Edwin had planned for the close of the evening were swiftly multiplied. He had misgivings.

The chattering, giggling girls entered the drawing-room. But as Maggie came through the doorway her face stiffened; her eyes took on a glaze; and when Ingpen bent over her hand in all the false ardour of his excessive conventional chivalry, the spinster's terrible constraint—scourge of all her social existence—gripped her like a disease. She could not speak.

"Hello, Mag," Edwin greeted her.

Impossible to divine in this plump, dowdy, fading, dumb creature the participator in all those chatterings and gigglings of a few moments earlier! Nevertheless Edwin, who knew her profoundly, could see beneath the glaze of those eyes the common-sense soul of the sagacious woman protesting against Ingpen's affected manners and deciding that she did not care for Ingpen at all.

"Auntie Hamps is being naughty again," said Hilda bluntly.

Ingpen, and then Edwin, sniggered.

"I can't do anything with her, Edwin," said Maggie, speaking quickly and eagerly, as she and Hilda sat down. "She's bound to let herself in for another attack if she doesn't

take care of herself. And she won't take care of herself. She won't listen to the doctor or anybody else. She's always on her feet, and she's got sewing-meetings on the brain just now. I've got her to bed early to-night—she's frightfully shaky—and I thought I'd come up and tell you. You're the only one that can do anything with her at all, and you really must come and see her to-morrow on your way to the works."

Maggie spoke as though she had been urging Edwin for months to take the urgent matter in hand and was now arrived at desperation.

"All right! All right!" said he, with amiable impatience; it was the first he had heard of the matter. "I'll drop in. But I've got no influence over her," he added, with sincerity.

"Oh, yes, you have!" said Maggie, mildly now. "I'm very sorry to hear about George's eyes. Seeing it's absolutely necessary for Hilda to take him to London to-morrow, and you've got no servants at all, can't you come and sleep at Auntie's for a night or two? You've no idea what a relief it would be to me."

In an instant Edwin saw that he was beaten, that Hilda and Maggie, in the intervals of their giggling, had combined to overthrow him. The tone in which Maggie uttered the words 'George's eyes,' 'absolutely necessary,' and 'such a relief' precluded argument. His wife would have her capricious, unnecessary way, and he would be turned out of his own house.

"I think you might, dear," said Hilda, with the angelic persuasiveness of a loving and submissive wife. Nobody could have guessed from that marvellous tone that she had been determined to defeat him and was then, so to speak, standing over his prostrate form.

Maggie, having said what was necessary to be said, fell back into the constraint from which no efforts of her companions could extricate her. Such was the effect upon her of the presence of Tertius Ingpen, a stranger. Presently Ingpen was scanning time-tables for Hilda, and George was finding note-paper for her, and Maggie was running up and downstairs for her. She was off to London. "In that woman's head," thought Edwin, as, observing his wife, he



tried in vain to penetrate the secrets behind her demeanour, "there's only room for one idea at a time."

## VII

Edwin sat alone in the drawing-room, at the end of an evening which he declined to call an evening at all. His eyes regarded a book on his knee, but he was not reading it. His mind was engaged upon the enigma of his existence. He had entered his house without the least apprehension, and brusquely, in a few hours, everything seemed to be changed for him. Impulse had conquered common sense; his ejection was a settled thing; and he was condemned to the hated abode of Auntie Hamps. Events seemed enormous; they desolated him; his mouth was full of ashes. The responsibilities connected with George were increasing; his wife, incalculable and unforeseeable, was getting out of hand; and the menace of a future removal to another home in the country was raised again.

He looked about the room, and he imagined all the house, every object in which was familiar and beloved, and he simply could not bear to think of the disintegration of these interiors by furniture removers, and of the endless rasping business of creating a new home in partnership with a woman whose ideas about furnishing were as unsound as they were capricious. He utterly dismissed the fanciful scheme, as he dismissed the urgings towards public activity. He deeply resented all these headstrong intentions to disturb him in his tranquillity. They were indefensible, and he would not have them. He would die in sullen obstinacy rather than yield. Impulse might conquer common sense, but not beyond a certain degree. He would never yield.

Ingpen had departed, to sleep in a room in the same building as his office at Hanbridge. He knew that Ingpen had no comprehension of domestic comfort and a well-disposed day. Nevertheless, he envied the man his celestial freedom. If he, Edwin, were free, what an ideal life he could make for himself, a life presided over by common sense, regularity, and order! He was not free; he would never be free; and what had he obtained in exchange for freedom? . . . Ingpen's immense criticism smote him. He had a wife and her child; servants

—at intervals ; a fine works and many workpeople ; a house, with books ; money ; security. The organized machinery of his existence was tremendous ; and it was all due to him, made by him in his own interests and to satisfy his own desires. Without him the entire structure would crumble in a week ; without him it would have no excuse. And what was the result ? Was he ever, in any ideal sense, happy—that is, free from foreboding, from friction, from responsibility,—and withal lightly joyous ? Was any quarter of an hour of his day absolutely what he would have wished ? He ranged over his day, and concluded that the best part of it was the very last. . . . He got into bed, the candles in the sconce were lit, the gas diminished to a blue speck, and most of the room in darkness ; he lay down on his left side, took the marker from the volume in his hand, and began to read ; the house was silent and enclosed, the rumbling tramcar—to whose sound he had been accustomed from infancy—did not a bit disturb him ; it was in another world ; over the edge of his book he could see the form of his wife, fast asleep in the other bed, her plaited hair trailing over the pillow ; the feel of the sheets to his limbs was exquisite ; he read, the book was good ; the chill of winter just pleasantly affected the hand that held the book ; nothing annoyed ; nothing jarred ; sleep approached. . . . That fifteen minutes, that twenty or thirty minutes, was all that he could show as the result of the tremendous organized machinery of his existence—his house, his works, his workpeople, his servants, his wife with her child. . . .

Hilda came with quick determination into the drawing-room. They had not spoken to each other alone since the decision and his defeat. He was aware of his heart beating resentfully.

“ I’m going to bed now, dear,” she said in an ordinary tone. “ I’ve got a frightful headache, and I must sleep. Be sure and wake me up at seven in the morning, will you ? I shall have such lots to do.”

He thought :

“ Has she a frightful headache ? ”

She bent down and kissed him several times, very fervently ; her lips lingered on his. And all the time she

frowned ever so little, and it was as if she was conveying to him : " But—each for himself in marriage, after all."

In spite of himself, he felt just a little relieved ; and he could not understand why ! He watched her as she left the room. How had it come about that the still finally mysterious creature was living in his house, imposing her individuality upon him, spoiling his existence ? He considered that it was all disconcertingly strange.

He rose, lit a cigarette, and opened the window ; and the frosty air, entering, braced him and summoned his self-reliance. The night was wondrous. And when he had shut the window and turned again within, the room, beautiful, withdrawn, peaceful, was wondrous too. He reflected that soon he would be in bed, calmly reading, with his wife unconscious as an infant in the other bed. And then his grievance against Hilda slowly surged up, and he began for the first time to realize how vast it was.

" Confound that woman ! " he muttered, meaning Auntie Hamps.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### AUNTIE HAMPS SENTENCED

#### I

ON the next evening it was Maggie who opened Mrs. Hamps's front-door for Edwin. There was no light in the lobby, but a faint gleam coming through the open door of the sitting-room disclosed the silhouette of Maggie's broad figure.

"I thought you'd call in this morning," said Maggie discontentedly. "I asked you to. I've been expecting you all day."

"Didn't you get my message?"

"No. What message?"

"D'you mean to say a lad hasn't been here with my portmanteau?" demanded Edwin, alarmed and ready to be annoyed.

"Yes. A lad's been with your portmanteau. But he gave no message."

"D——n him! I told him to tell you I couldn't possibly get here before night."

"Well, he didn't!" said Maggie stoutly, throwing back the blame upon Edwin and his hirelings. "I particularly wanted you to come early. I told Auntie you'd be coming."

"How's she getting on?" Edwin asked with laconic gruffness, dismissing Maggie's grievance without an apology. He might have to stand nonsense from Hilda; but he would not stand it from Maggie, of whose notorious mildness he at once began to take advantage, as in the old days of their housekeeping together. Moreover, his entrance into this abode was a favour, exhibiting the condescension of the only human being who could exercise influence upon Auntie Hamps.

"She's worse," said Maggie, briefly and significantly.

"In bed?" said Edwin, less casually, marking her tone. Maggie nodded.

"Had the doctor?"

"I should think so indeed!"

"Hm! Why don't you have a light in this lobby?" he inquired suddenly, on a dryly humorous note, as he groped to suspend his overcoat upon an unstable hatstand. It seemed to be a very cold lobby, after his own radiator-heated hall.

"She never will have a light here, unless she's doing the grand for some one. Are you going to wash ye?"

"No. I cleaned up at the works." A presentiment of the damp chilliness of the Hamps' bedroom had suggested this precaution.

Maggie preceded him into the sitting-room, where a hexagonal occasional-table was laid for tea.

"Hello! Do you eat here? What's the matter with the dining-room?"

"The chimney always smokes when the wind's in the south-west."

"Well, why doesn't she have a cowl put on it?"

"You'd better ask her. . . . Also she likes to save a fire. She can't bear to have two fires going as well as the kitchen-range. I'll bring tea in. It's all ready."

Maggie went away.

Edwin looked round the shabby Victorian room. A length of featureless linoleum led from the door to the table. This carpet-protecting linoleum exasperated him. It expressed the very spirit of his aunt's house. He glanced at the pictures, the texts, the beady and the woolly embroideries, the harsh chairs, and the magnificent morocco exteriors of the photograph-albums in which Auntie Hamps kept the shiny portraits of all her relatives, from grand-nieces back to the third and fourth generation of ancestors. And a feeling of desolation came over him. He thought: "How many days shall I have to spend in this deadly hole?" It was extremely seldom that he visited King Street, and when he did come the house was brightened to receive him. He had almost forgotten what the house really was. And, suddenly thrown back into it at its most lugubrious and ignoble, after years of



the amenities of Trafalgar Road, he was somehow surprised that that sort of thing had continued to exist, and he resented that it should have dared to continue to exist. He had a notion that, since he had left it behind, it ought to have perished.

He cautiously lifted the table and carried it to the hearth-rug. Then he sat down in the easy chair, whose special property, as he remembered, was slowly and inevitably to slide the sitter forward to the hard edge of the seat ; and he put his feet inside the fender. In the grate a small fire burned between two firebricks. He sneezed.

Maggie came in with a tray.

"Are you cold?" she asked, seeing the new situation of the table.

"Am I cold!" Edwin repeated.

"Well," said Maggie, "I always think your rooms are so hot."

Edwin seized the small serviceable tongs which saved the wear of the large tongs matching the poker and the shovel, and he dragged both firebricks out of the grate.

"No coal here, I suppose!" he exclaimed gloomily, opening the black japanned coal-scuttle. "Oh! Corn in Egypt!" The scuttle was full of coal. He threw on to the fire several profuse shovelfuls of best household nuts which had cost sixteen shillings a ton even in that district of cheap coal.

"Well," Maggie murmured, aghast. "It's a good thing it's you. If it had been anybody else——"

"What on earth does she do with her money?" he muttered.

Shrugging her shoulders, Maggie went out again with an empty tray.

"No servant, either?" Edwin asked, when she returned.

"She's sitting with Auntie."

"Must I go up before I have my tea?"

"No. She won't have heard you come."

There was a grilled mutton-chop and a boiled egg on the crowded small table, with tea, bread-and-butter, two rounds of dry bread, some cakes, and jam.

"Which are you having—egg or chop?" Edwin demanded as Maggie sat down.

"Oh! They're both for you."

"And what about you?"

"I only have bread-and-butter as a rule."

Edwin grunted, and started to eat.

"What's supposed to be the matter with her?" he inquired.

"It seems it's congestion of the lung, and thickened arteries. It wouldn't matter so much about the lung being congested, in itself, only it's the strain on her heart."

"I see."

"Been in bed all day, I suppose?"

"No, she would get up. But she had to go back to bed at once. She had a collapse."

"Hm!"

He could not think of anything else to say.

"Haven't got to-night's 'Signal,' have you?"

"Oh, no!" said Maggie, astonished at such a strange demand. "Hilda get off all right?"

"Yes, they went by the nine train."

"She told me that she should, if she could manage it. I expect Mrs. Tams was up there early."

Edwin nodded, recalling with bitterness certain moments of the early morning. And then silence ensued. The brother and sister could not keep the conversation alive. Edwin thought: "We know each other intimately, and we respect each other, and yet we cannot even conduct a meal together without awkwardness and constraint. Has civilization down here got no further than that?" He felt sorry for Maggie, and also kindly disdainful of her. He glanced at her furtively and tried to see in her the girl of the far past. She had grown immensely older than himself. She was now at home in the dreadful Hamps environment. True, she had an income, but had she any pleasures? It was impossible to divine what her pleasures might be, what she thought about when she lay in bed, to what hours she looked forward. First his father, then himself, and lastly Auntie Hamps had subjugated her. And of the three Auntie Hamps had most ruthlessly succeeded, and in the shortest time. And yet—Edwin felt—even Auntie Hamps had not quite succeeded, and the original individual still survived in Maggie, and was silently critical of all the phenomena which surrounded her and to which she

had apparently submitted. Realizing this, Edwin ceased to be kindly disdainful.

Towards the end of the meal a heavy foot was heard on the stairs.

"Minnie!" Maggie called.

After shuffling and hesitation the sitting-room door was pushed ever so little open.

"Yes, miss," said some one feebly.

"Why have you left Mrs. Hamps? Do you need anything?"

"Missis made me go, miss," came the reply, very loosely articulated.

"Come in and take your bread," said Maggie, and aside to Edwin: "Auntie's at it again!"

After another hesitation the door opened wide, and Minnie became visible. She was rather a big girl, quite young, fat, too fair, undecided, obviously always between two minds. Her large apron, badly-fitting over the blue frock, was of a dubious yellow colour. She wore spectacles. Behind her spectacles she seemed to be blinking in confusion at all the subtle complexities of existence. She advanced irregularly to the table with a sort of nervous desperation, as if saying: "I have to go through this ordeal." Edwin could not judge whether she was about to smile or about to weep.

"Here's your bread," said Maggie, indicating the two rounds of dry bread. "I've left the dripping on the kitchen table for you."

Edwin, revolted, perceived of course in a flash what the life of Minnie was under the regime of Auntie Hamps.

"Thank ye, miss."

He noticed that the veiled voice was that of a rather deaf person.

Blushing, Minnie took the bread, and moved away. Just as she reached the door, she gave a great sob, followed by a number of little ones; and the bread fell on to the carpet. She left it there, and vanished, still violently sobbing.

Edwin, spellbound, stopped masticating. A momentary sensation almost of horror seized him. Maggie turned pale, and he was glad that she turned pale. If she had shown by no sign that such happenings were unusual, he would have

been afraid of the very house itself, of its mere sinister walls which seemed to shelter sick tyrants, miserable victims, and enchanted captives ; he would have begun to wonder whether he himself was safe in it.

“ What next ? ” muttered Maggie, intimidated but plucky, rising and following Minnie. “ Just go up to Auntie, will you ? ” she called to Edwin over her shoulder. “ She oughtn’t really to be left alone for a minute.”

## II

Edwin pushed open the door and crept with precautions into the bedroom. Mrs. Hamps was dozing. In the half-light of the lowered gas he looked at her and was alarmed, shocked, for it was at once apparent that she must be very ill. She lay reclining against several crumpled and crushed pillows, with her head on one side and her veined hands limp on the eiderdown, between the heavy brown side-curtains that hung from the carved mahogany tester. The posture seemed to be that of an exhausted animal, surprised by the unconsciousness of final fatigue, shameless in the intense need of repose. Auntie Hamps had ceased to be a Wesleyan, a pillar of society, a champion of the conventions, and a keeper-up of appearances ; she was just an utterly wearied and beaten creature, breathing noisily through wide-open mouth. Edwin could not remember ever having seen her when she was not to some extent arrayed for the world’s gaze ; he had not seen her at the crisis of any of her recent attacks. He knew that more than once she had recovered when good judges had pronounced recovery impossible ; but he was quite sure, now, that she would never rise from that bed. He had the sudden dreadful thought : “ She is done for, sentenced, cut off from the rest of us. This is the end for her. She won’t be able to pretend any more. All her efforts have come to this.” The thought affected him like a blow. And two somewhat contradictory ideas sprang from it : first, the entire absurdity of her career as revealed by its close, and secondly, the tragic dignity with which its close was endowing her.

At once contemptible and august, she was diminished, even in size. Her scanty grey hair was tousled. Her pink

flannel night-dress with its long, loose sleeves was grotesque ; the multitude of her patched outer wrappings, from which peeped her head on its withered neck, and safety-pins, and the orifice of a hot-water bag, were equally grotesque. None of the bed-linen was clean, or of good quality. The eider-down was old, and the needle-points of its small white feathers were piercing it. The table at the bed-head had a strange collection of poor, odd crockery. The whole room, with its distempered walls of an uncomfortable green colour, in spite of several respectable pieces of mahogany furniture, seemed to be the secret retreat of a graceless and mean indigence. And above all it was damply cold ; the window stood a little open, and only the tiniest fire burnt in the inefficient grate.

For decades Auntie Hamps, with her erect figure and handsome face, her black silks, jet ornaments, and sealskins, her small regular subscriptions and her spasmodic splendours of golden generosity, her heroic relentless hypocrisies and her absolute self-reliance and independence, had exhibited a glorious front to the world. With her, person and individuality were almost everything, and the environment she had made for herself almost nothing. The ground-floor of her house was presentable, especially when titivated for occasional hospitalities, but not more than presentable. The upper floor was never shown. In particular, Auntie Hamps was not one of those women who invite other women to their bedrooms. Her bedroom was guarded like a fastness. In it, unbeheld, lived the other Auntie Hamps, complementary to the grand and massive Mrs. Hamps known to mankind. And now the fastness was exposed, defenceless, and its squalid avaricious secrets discovered ; and she was too broken to protest. There was something unbearably pitiful in that. Her pose was pitiful and her face was pitiful. Those features were still far from ugly ; the contours of the flushed cheeks, the chin, and the convex eyelids were astonishingly soft, and recalled the young girl of about half a century earlier. She was both old and young in her troubled unconsciousness. The reflection was inevitable : " She was a young girl—and now she is sentenced." Edwin felt himself desolated by a terrible gloom which questioned the justification of all life. The cold of the room made him shiver. After gazing for a



long time at the sufferer, he tiptoed to the fire. On the painted iron mantelpiece were a basalt clock and three photographs ; a recent photograph of smirking Clara surrounded by her brood ; a faded photograph of Maggie as a young girl, intolerably dowdy ; and an equally faded photograph of himself as a young man of twenty,—he remembered the suit and the neck-tie in which he had been photographed. The simplicity, the ingenuousness, of his own boyish face moved him deeply and at the same time disgusted him. “ Was I like that ? ” he thought, astounded, and he felt intensely sorry for the raw youth. Above the clock was suspended by a ribbon a new green card, lettered in silver with some verses entitled ‘ Lean Hard.’ This card, he knew, had superseded a booklet of similar tenor that used to lie on the dressing-table when he was an infant. The verses began :

*“ Child of My love, ‘ Lean hard,’  
And let Me feel the pressure of thy care.”*

And they ended :

*“ Thou lovest Me. I knew it. Doubt not then,  
But loving Me, LEAN HARD.”*

All his life he had laughed at the notion of his Auntie leaning hard upon anything whatever. Yet she had lived continually with these verses ever since the year of their first publication ; she had never tired of their message. And now Edwin was touched. He seemed to see some sincerity, some beauty, in them. He had a vision of their author, unknown to literature, but honoured in a hundred thousand respectable homes. He thought : “ Did Auntie only pretend to believe in them ? Or did she think she did believe in them ? Or did she really believe in them ? ” The last seemed a possibility. Supposing she did really believe in them ? . . . Yes, he was touched. He was ready to admit that spirituality was denied to none. He seemed to come into contact with the universal immanent spirituality.

Then he stooped to put some bits of coal silently on the fire.

“ Who’s that putting coal on the fire ? ” said a faint but sharply protesting voice from the bed.

The weakness of the voice gave Edwin a fresh shock. The voice seemed to be drawing on the very last reserves of its owner's vitality. Owing to the height of the foot of the bed, Auntie Hamps could not see anything at the fire-place lower than the mantelpiece. As she withdrew from earth she employed her fading faculties to expostulate against a waste of coal and to identify the unseen criminal.

"I am," said Edwin cheerfully. "It was nearly out."

He stood up, smiling slightly, and faced her.

Auntie Hamps, lifting her head and frowning in surprise, gazed at him for a few moments, as if trying to decide who he was. Then she said, in the same enfeebled tone as before:

"Eh, Edwin! I never heard you come in. This *is* an honour!" And her head dropped back.

"I'm sleeping here," said Edwin, with determined cheerfulness. "Did ye know?"

She reflected, and answered deliberately, using her volition to articulate every syllable:

"Yes. Ye're having Maggie's room."

"Oh, no, Auntie!"

"Yes, you are. I've told her." The faint voice became harshly obstinate. "Turn the gas up a bit, Edwin, so that I can see you. Well, this is an honour. Did Maggie give ye a proper tea?"

"Oh, yes, thanks. . . Splendid."

He raised the gas. Auntie Hamps blinked.

"You want something to shade this gas," said Edwin. "I'll fix ye something."

The gas-bracket was a little to the right of the fire-place, over the dressing-table, and nearly opposite the bed. Auntie Hamps nodded. Having glanced about, Edwin put a bonnet-box on the dressing-table, and on that, upright and open, the Hamps family Bible from the ottoman. The infirm creation was just lofty enough to come between the light and the old woman's eyes.

"That'll be better," said he. "You're not at all well, I hear, Auntie." He endeavoured to be tactful.

She slowly shook her head as it lay on the pillow.

"This is one of my bad days. . . . But I shall pick up. . . . Then has Hilda taken George to London?"

Edwin nodded.

"Eh, I do hope and pray it'll be all right. I've had such good eyesight myself, I'm all the more afraid for others. What a blessing it's been to me! . . . Eh, what a good mother dear Hilda is!" She added after a pause: "I dare say there never was such a mother as Hilda, unless it's Clara."

"Has Clara been in to-day?" Edwin demanded, to change the subject of conversation.

"No, she hasn't. But she will, as soon as she has a moment. She'll be popping in. They're such a tie on her, those children are—and how she looks after them! . . . Edwin!" She called him, as though he were receding.

"Yes?"

The frail voice continued, articulating with great carefulness, and achieving each sentence as though it were a miracle, as indeed it was:

"I think no one ever had such nephews and nieces as I have. I've never had children of my own—that was not to be!—but I must say the Lord has made it up to me in my nephews and nieces. You and Hilda . . . and Clara and Albert . . . and the little chicks!" Tears stood in her eyes.

"You're forgetting Maggie," said Edwin lightly.

"Yes," Auntie Hamps agreed, but in a quite different tone, reluctant and critical. "I'm sure Maggie does her best. Oh! I'm sure she does . . . Edwin!" Again she called him.

He approached the tumbled bed, and even sat on the edge of it, his hands in his pockets. Auntie Hamps, though breathing now more rapidly and with more difficulty, seemed to have revitalized herself at some mysterious source of energy. She was still preoccupied by the mental concentration and the effort of volition required for the smallest physical acts incident to her continued existence; but she had accumulated power for the furtherance of greater ends.

"D'ye want anything?" Edwin suggested, indicating the contents of the night-table.

She moved her head to signify a negative. Her pink-clad arms did not stir. And her whole being seemed to be suspended while she prepared for an exertion.

"I'm so relieved you've come," she said at length, slowly

and painfully. "You can't think what a relief it is to me. I've really no one but you. . . . It's about that girl."

"What girl?"

"Minnie."

"The servant?"

Mrs. Hamps inclined her head, and fetched breath through the wide-open mouth. "I've only just found it out. She's in trouble. Oh! She admitted it to me a bit ago. I sent her downstairs. I wouldn't have her in my bedroom a minute longer. She's in trouble. I felt sure she was. . . . She was at class-meeting last Wednesday. And only yesterday I paid her her wages. Only yesterday! Here she lives on the fat of the land, and what does she do for it? I assure you I have to see to everything myself. I'm always after her. . . . In a month she won't be fit to be seen. . . . Edwin, I've never been so ashamed. . . . That I should have to tell such a thing to my own nephew!" She ceased, exhausted.

Edwin was somewhat amused. He could not help feeling amused at such an accident happening in the house of Mrs. Hamps.

"Who's the man?" he asked.

"Yes, and that's another thing!" answered Mrs. Hamps solemnly, in her extreme weakness. "It's the barman at the Vaults, of all people. She wouldn't admit it, but I know."

"What are you going to do?"

"She must leave my house at once."

"Where does she live—I mean her people?"

"She has no parents." Auntie Hamps reflected for a few moments. "She has an aunt at Axe."

"Well, she can't get to Axe to-night," said Edwin positively.

"Does Maggie know about it?"

"Maggie!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamps scornfully. "Maggie never notices *anything*." She added in a graver tone: "And there's no reason why Maggie should know. It's not the sort of thing that Maggie ought to know about. You can speak to the girl herself. It will come much better from you. I shall simply tell Maggie I've decided the girl must go."

"She can't go to-night," Edwin repeated, humouringly, but firmly.

Auntie Hamps proved the sincerity of her regard for him by yielding.

"Well," she murmured, "to-morrow morning, then. She can turn out the sitting-room, and clean the silver in the black box, and then she can go—before dinner. I don't see why I should give her her dinner. Nor her extra day's wages either."

"And what shall you do for a servant? Get a charwoman?"

"Charwoman? No! Maggie will manage." And then with a sudden flare of relished violence: "I always knew that girl was a mopsy slut. And what's more, if you ask me, she brought him into the house—and after eleven o'clock at night too!"

"All right!" Edwin muttered, to soothe the patient.

And Mrs. Hamps sadly smiled.

"It's such a relief to me," she breathed. "You don't know what a relief to me it is to put it in your hands."

Her eyelids dropped. She said no more. Having looked back for an instant in a supreme effort on behalf of the conventions upon which society was established, Auntie Hamps turned again exhausted towards the lifting veil of the unknown. And Edwin began to realize the significance of the scene that was ended.

### III

"I say," Edwin began, when he had silently closed the door of the sitting-room. "Here's a lark, if you like!" And he gave a short laugh. It was under such language and such demeanour that he concealed his real emotion, which was partly solemn, partly pleasurable, and wholly buoyant.

Maggie looked up gloomily. With a bit of pencil held very close to the point in her heavy fingers, she was totting up the figures of household accounts in a penny red-covered cash-book.

Edwin went on:

"It seems the girl yon"—he indicated the kitchen with a jerk of the head—" 's been and got herself into a mess."

Maggie leaned her chin on her hand.



"Has she been talking to you about it?" With a similar jerk of the head Maggie indicated Mrs. Hamps's bedroom.

"Yes."

"I suppose she's only just found it out?"

"Who? Auntie? Yes. Did you know about it?"

"Did I know about it?" Maggie repeated with mild disdainful impatience. "Of course I knew about it. I've known for weeks. But I wasn't going to tell *her*." She finished bitterly.

Edwin regarded his sister with new respect and not without astonishment. Never before in their lives had they discussed any inconvenient sexual phenomenon. Save for vague and very careful occasional reference to Clara's motherhood, Maggie had never given any evidence to her brother that she was acquainted with what are called in Anglo-Saxon countries 'the facts of life,' and he had somehow thought of her as not having emerged, at the age of forty-four or so, from the naïve ignorance of the young girl. Now her perfectly phlegmatic attitude in front of the Minnie episode seemed to betoken a familiarity that approached cynicism. And she was not at all tongue-tied; she was at her ease. She had become a woman of the world. Edwin liked her; he liked her manner and her tone. His interest in the episode even increased.

"She was for turning her out to-night," said he. "I stopped that."

"I should think so indeed!"

"I've got her as far as to-morrow morning."

"The girl won't go to-morrow morning either!" said Maggie. "At least, if she goes, I go." She spoke with tranquillity, adding: "But we needn't bother about that. Auntie'll be past worrying about Minnie to-morrow morning. . . . I'd better go up to her. She can't possibly be left alone."

Maggie shut the account-book, and rose.

"I only came down for a sec. to tell you. She was dozing," said Edwin apologetically. "She's awfully ill. I'd no idea."

"Yes, she's ill right enough."

"Who'll sit up with her?"

"I shall."

"Did you sit up with her last night?"

"No—only part of the night."

"We ought to get a nurse."

"Well, we can't get one to-night."

"And what about Clara? Can't she take a turn? Surely in a case like this she can chuck her eternal kids for a bit."

"I expect she could. But she doesn't know."

"Haven't you sent round?" He expressed surprise.

"I couldn't," said Maggie with undisturbed equanimity.

"Who could I send? I couldn't spare Minnie. The thing didn't seem at all serious until this morning. Since then I've had my hands full."

"Yes, I can see you have," Edwin agreed appreciatively.

"It was lucky the doctor called on his own. He does sometimes, you know, since she began to have her attacks."

"Well, I'll go round to Clara's myself," said Edwin.

"I shouldn't," said Maggie. "At least not to-night."

"Why not?" He might have put the question angrily, overbearingly; but Maggie was so friendly, suave, confidential, persuasive, and so sure of herself, that with pleasure he copied her accents. He enjoyed thus talking to her intimately in the ugly dark house, with the life-bearing, foolish Minnie on the one hand, and the dying old woman on the other. He thought: "There's something splendid about Mag. In fact I always knew there was." And he forgot her terrible social shortcomings, her utter lack of the feminine seductiveness that for him ought to be in every woman, and her invincible stolidity. Her sturdy and yet scarcely articulate championship of Minnie delighted him and quickened his pulse.

"I'd sooner not have her here to-night," said Maggie.

"You knew they'd had a tremendous rumpus, didn't you?"

"Who? Auntie and Clara?"

"Yes."

"I didn't. What about? When? Nobody ever said anything to me."

"Oh, it must have been two or three months ago. Auntie said something about Albert not paying me my interest on

my money he's got. And then Clara flared up, and the fat was in the fire."

"D'you mean to say he's not paying you your interest? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Oh! It doesn't matter. I didn't want to bother you."

"Well, you ought to have bothered me," said Edwin, with a trace of benevolent severity. He was astounded, and somewhat hurt, that this great family event should have been successfully concealed from him. He felt furious against Albert and Clara, and at the same time proud that his prognostication about the investment with Albert had proved correct.

"Did Hilda know?"

"Oh, yes. Hilda knew."

"Well, I'm dashed!" The exclamation showed *naïveté*. His impression of the chicanery of women was deepened, so that it actually disquieted him. "But I suppose," he went on, "I suppose this row isn't going to stop Clara from coming here, seeing the state Auntie's in?"

"No, certainly not. Clara would come like a shot if she knew, and Albert as well. She's a good nurse—in some ways."

"Well, if they aren't told, and anything happens to Auntie in the night, there'll be a fine to-do afterwards,—don't forget that."

"Nothing'll happen to Auntie in the night," said Maggie, with tranquil reassurance. "And I don't think I could stand 'em to-night."

The hint of her nervous susceptibility, beneath that stolid exterior, appealed to him.

Maggie, since closing the account-book, had moved foot by foot anxiously towards the door, and had only been kept in the room by the imperative urgency of the conversation. She now had her hand on the door.

"I say!" He held her yet another moment. "What's this about me taking your room? I don't want to turn you out of your room."

"That's all right," she said, with a kind smile. "It's easiest, really. Moreover, I dare say there won't be such a

lot of sleeping. . . . I must go up at once. She can't possibly be left alone."

Maggie opened the door, and she had scarcely stepped forth when Minnie from the kitchen rushed into the lobby and dropped, intentionally or unintentionally, on her knees before her. Edwin, unobserved by Minnie, witnessed the scene through the doorway. Minnie, agitated almost to the point of hysteria, was crying violently, and as she breathed her shoulders lifted and fell and the sound of her sobbing rose periodically to a shriek and sank to a groan. She knelt with her body and thighs upright and her head erect, making no attempt to stem the tears or to hide her face. In her extreme desolation she was perhaps as unconscious of herself as she had ever been. Her cap was awry on her head, and her hair disarranged; the blinking spectacles made her ridiculous; only the blue print uniform, and the sinister yellowish apron drawn down tight under her knees, gave a certain respectable regularity to her extraordinary and grotesque appearance.

To Edwin she seemed excessively young and yet far too large and too developed for her age. The girl was obviously a fool. Edwin could perceive in her no charm whatever, except that of her innocence; and it was not easy to imagine that any man, even the barman at the Vaults, could have mistaken her, even momentarily, for the ideal. And then some glance of her spectacled eyes, or some gesture of the great red hand, showed him his own blindness and mysteriously made him realize the immensity of the illusion and the disillusion through which she had passed in her foolish and incontinent simplicity. What had happened to her was miraculous, exquisite, and terrible. He felt the magic of her illusion and the terror of her disillusion. Already in her girlishness and her stupidity she had lived through supreme hours. "Compared to her," he thought, "I don't know what life is. No man does." And he not only suffered for her sorrow, he gave her a sacred quality. It seemed to him that heaven itself ought to endow her with beauty, grace, and wisdom, so that she might meet with triumphant dignity the ordeals that awaited her; and that mankind should supplement the work of heaven by clothing her richly and

housing her in secluded splendour, and offering her the service which only victims merit. Surely her caprices ought to be indulged and honoured! . . . Edwin was indignant; indignation positively burnt his body. She was helpless and defenceless and she had been exploited by Auntie Hamps. And after having been exploited she had been driven out by ukase on week-night to class-meeting and on Sunday night to chapel, to find Christ, with the result that she had found the barman at the Vaults. The consequences were inevitable. She was definitely ruined, unless the child should bereave her by dying; and even then she might still be ruined. And what about the child, if the child lived? And although Edwin had never seen the silly girl before, he said to himself, while noticing that a crumb or two of the bread dropped by her still remained on the floor: "I'll see that girl through whatever it costs!" He was not indignant against Auntie Hamps. How could he be indignant against an expiring old creature already desperate in the final dilemma? He felt nearly as sorry for Auntie Hamps as for Minnie. He was indignant against destiny, of which Auntie Hamps was only the miserable, unimaginative instrument.

"I'd better go to-night, miss. Let me go to-night!" cried Minnie. And she cried so loudly that Edwin was afraid Auntie Hamps might hear and might make an apparition at the head of the stairs and curse Minnie with fearful Biblical names. And the old woman in the curtained bed upstairs was almost as present to him as the girl kneeling before his eyes on the linoleum of the lobby.

"Minnie! Minnie! Don't be foolish!" said Maggie, standing over her and soothing her, not with her hands but with her voice.

Maggie had shown no perturbation or even surprise at Minnie's behaviour. She stood looking down at her benevolent, deprecating, and calm. And by contrast with Minnie she seemed to be quite middle-aged. Her tone was exactly right. It reminded Edwin of the tone which she would use to himself when she was sixteen and the housekeeper, and he was twelve. Maggie had long since lost authority over him; she had lost everything; she would die without having lived; she had never begun to live—(No, perhaps once she had just



begun to live !)—Minnie had prime knowledge far exceeding hers. And yet she had power over Minnie and could exercise it with skill.

Minnie, hesitating, sobbed more slowly, and then ceased to sob.

“Go back into the kitchen and have something to eat, and then you can go to bed. You’ll feel differently in the morning,” said Maggie with the same gentle blandness.

And Minnie, as though fascinated, rose from her knees.

Edwin, surmising what had passed between the two in the kitchen while he was in the bedroom, was aware of a fresh, intense admiration for Maggie. She might be dowdy, narrow, dull, obstinate, virgin,—but she was superb. She had terrific reserves. He was proud of her. The tone merely of her voice as she spoke to the girl seemed to prove the greatness of her deeply-hidden soul.

Suddenly Minnie caught sight of Edwin through the doorway, flushed red, had the air of slavishly apologizing to the unapproachable male for having disturbed him by her insect-woes, and vanished. Maggie hurried upstairs to the departing. Edwin was alone with the chill draught from the lobby into the room, and with the wonder of life.

#### IV

In the middle of the night Edwin kept watch over Auntie Hamps, who was asleep. He sat in a rocking-chair, with his back to the window and the right side of his face to the glow of the fire. The fire was as effective as the size and form of the grate would allow ; it burnt richly red ; but its influence did not seem to extend beyond a radius of four feet outwards from its centre. The terrible damp chill of the Five Towns winter hung in the bedroom like an invisible miasma. He could feel the cold from the window, which was nevertheless shut, through the shawl with which he had closed the interstices of the back of the chair, and, though he had another thick shawl over his kness, the whole of his left side felt the creeping attack of the insidious miasma. A thermometer which he had found and which lay on the night-table five yards from the fire registered only fifty-two degrees. His expelled breath showed in the air. It was as if he were

fighting with all resources against frigidity, and barely holding his own.

In the half-light of the gas, still screened from the bed by the bonnet-box and the Bible, he glanced round amid the dark shadows at the mean and sinister ugliness of the historic chamber, the secret nest and withdrawing place of Auntie Hamps ; and the real asceticism of her life and of the life of all her generation almost smote him. Half a century earlier such a room had represented comfort ; in some details, as for instance in its bed, it represented luxury ; and in half a century Auntie Hamps had learnt nothing from the material progress of civilization but the use of the hot-water bag ; her vanished and forgotten parents would have looked askance at the enervating luxuriousness of her hot-water bag—unknown even to the crude wistful boy Edwin on the mantelpiece. And Auntie Hamps herself was wont, as it were, to atone for it by using the still tepid water therefrom for her morning toilet instead of having truly hot water brought up from the kitchen. Edwin thought : “ Are we happier for these changes brought about by the mysterious force of evolution ? ” And answered very emphatically : “ Yes, we are.” He would not for anything have gone back to the austerities of his boyhood.

He rocked gently to and fro in the chair, excited by events and by the novel situation, and he was not dissatisfied with himself. Indeed he was aware of a certain calm complacency, for his common sense had triumphed over Maggie’s devoted silly womanishness. Maggie was for sitting up through the night ; she was anxious to wear herself out for no reason whatever ; but he had sent her to bed until three o’clock, promising to call her if she should be needed. The exhausted girl was full of sagacity save on that one point of martyrdom to the fullest—apparently with her a point of honour. For the sake of the sensation of having martyrizied herself utterly she was ready to imperil her fitness for the morrow. She secretly thought it was unfair to call upon him, a man, to share her fatigues. He regarded himself as her superior in wisdom, and he was relieved that anyone so wise and balanced as Edwin Clayhanger had taken supreme charge of the household organism.

Restless, he got up from the chair and looked at the bed. He had heard no unusual sound therefrom, but to excuse his restlessness he had said: "Suppose some change had occurred and I didn't notice it!" No change had occurred. Auntie Hamps lay like a mite, like a baby forlorn, senile and defenceless, amid the heaped pillows and coverings of the bed. Within the deep gloom of the canopy and the over-arching curtains only her small, soft face was alive; even her hair was hidden in the indentation made by the weight of her head in the pillows. She was unconscious, either in sleep or otherwise,—he could not tell how. And in her unconsciousness the losing but obstinate fight against the power which was dragging her over the edge of eternity still went on. It showed in the apprehensive character of her breathing, which made a little momentary periodic cloud above her face, and in the uneasy muscular movements of the lips and jaws, and in the vague noises in her throat. A tremendous pity for her re-entered his heart, almost breaking it, because she was so beaten, and so fallen from the gorgeousness of her splendour. Even Minnie could have imposed her will upon Auntie Hamps now; each hour she weakened.

He had no more resentment against her on account of Minnie, no accusation to formulate. He was merely grieved, with a compassionate grief, that Auntie Hamps had learnt so little while living so long. He knew that she was cruel only because she was incapable of imagining what it was to be Minnie. He understood. She worshipped God under the form of respectability, but she did worship God. Like all religious votaries she placed religion above morality; hence her chicane, her inveterate deceit and self-deceit. It was with a religious aim that she had concealed from him the estrangement between herself and Clara. The unity of the family was one of her major canons (as indeed it was one of Edwin's). She had a passion for her nephew and nieces. It was a grand passion. Her pride in them must have been as terrific as her longing that they and all theirs should conform to the sole ideal that she comprehended. Undeniably there was something magnificent in her religion—her unscrupulousness in the practice of it, and the mighty consistency of her career. She had lived. He ceased to pity

her, for she towered above pity. She was dying, but only for an instant. He would smile at his aunt's primeval notions of a future life, yet he had to admit that his own notions, though far less precise, could not be appreciably less crude. He and she were anyhow at one in the profound and staggering conviction of immortality. Enlightened by that conviction, he was able to reduce the physical and mental tragedy of the death-bed to its right proportions as a transiency between the heroic past and the inconceivable future. And in the stillness of the room and the stillness of the house, perfumed by the abnegation of Maggie and the desolate woe of the ruined Minnie whom the Clayhangers would save, and in the outer stillness of the little street with the Norman church-tower, sticking up out of history at the bottom of its slope, Edwin felt uplifted and serene.

He returned to the rocking-chair.

"She's asleep now in some room I've never seen!" he reflected.

He was suddenly thinking of his wife. During the previous night, lying sleepless close to her while she slept soundly, he had reflected long and with increasing pessimism. The solace of Hilda's kiss had proved fleeting. She had not realized—he himself was then only realizing little by little—the enormity of the thing she had done. What she had deliberately and obstinately done was to turn him out of his house. No injury that she might have chosen could have touched him more closely, more painfully,—for his house to him was sacred. Her blundering with the servants might be condoned, but what excuse was it possible to find for this precipitate flight to London involving the summary ejection from the home of him who had created the home and for and by whom the home chiefly existed? True, the astounding feat of wrong-headedness had been aided by the mere chance of Maggie's calling (capricious women were always thus lucky!),—Maggie's suggestion and request had given some afterglow of reason to the mad project. But the justification was still far from sufficient. And the odious idea haunted him that, even if Maggie had not called with her tale, Hilda would have persisted in her scheme all the same. Yes, she was capable of that! The argument that

George's eyes (of whose condition she had learnt by mere hazard) could not wait until domestic affairs were arranged was too grotesque to deserve an answer.

Lying thus close to his wife in the dark, he had perceived that the conflict between his individuality and hers could never cease. No diplomatic devices of manner could put an end to it. And he had seen also that as they both grew older and developed more fully, the conflict was becoming more serious. He assumed that he had faults, but he was solemnly convinced that the faults of Hilda were tremendous, essential, and ineradicable. She had a faculty for acting contrary to justice and contrary to sense which was simply monstrous. And it had always been so. Her whole life had been made up of impulsiveness and contumacy in that impulsiveness. Witness the incredible scenes of the strange Dartmoor episode—all due to her stubborn irrationality! The perspective of his marriage was plain to him in the night,—and it ended in a rupture. He had been resolutely blind to Hilda's peculiarities, dismissing incident after incident as an isolated misfortune. But he could be blind no more. His marriage was all of a piece, and he must and would recognize the fact. . . . The sequel would be a scandal! . . . Well, let it be a scandal! As the minutes and hours passed in grim meditation, the more attractive grew the lost freedom of the bachelor and the more ready he felt to face any ordeal that lay between him and it. . . . And, just as it was occurring to him that his proper course was to have fought a terrific open decisive battle with her in front of both Maggie and Ingpen he had fallen asleep.

Upon waking, barely in time to arouse Hilda, he knew that the mood of the night had not melted away as such moods are apt to melt when the window begins to show a square of silver-grey. The mood was even intensified. Hilda had divined nothing. She never did divine the tortures which she inflicted in his heart. She did not possess the gumption to divine. Her demeanour had been amazing. She averred that she had not slept at all. Instead of cajoling, she bullied. Instead of tacitly admitting that she was infamously wronging him, she had assumed a grievance of her own—without stating it. Once she had said discontentedly about some



trifle : " You might *at any rate*—" as though the victim should caress the executioner. She had kissed him at departure, but not as usual effusively, and he had suffered the kiss in enmity ; and after an unimaginable general upset and confusion, in which George had shown himself strangely querulous, she had driven off with her son,—unconscious, stupidly unaware, that she was leaving a disaster behind her. And last of all Edwin, solitary, had been forced to perform the final symbolic act, that of locking him out of his own sacred home ! The affair had transcended belief.

All day at the works his bitterness and melancholy had been terrible, and the works had been shaken with apprehension, for no angry menaces are more disconcerting than those of a man habitually mild. Before evening he had decided to write to his wife from Auntie Hamps's,—a letter cold, unanswerable, crushing, that would confront her unescapably with the alternatives of complete submission or complete separation. The phrases of the letter came into his mind. . . . He would see who was master. . . . He had been full of the letter when he entered Auntie Hamps's lobby. But the strange tone in which Maggie had answered his questions about the sick woman had thrust the letter and the crisis right to the back of his mind, where they had uneasily remained throughout the evening.

And now in the rocking-chair he was reflecting :

" She's asleep in some room I've never seen ! "

He smiled, such a smile, candid, generous, and affectionate, as was Hilda's joy, such a smile as Hilda dwelt on in memory when she was alone. The mood of resentment passed away, vanished like a nightmare at dawn, and like one of his liverish headaches dispersed suddenly after the evening meal. He saw everything differently. He saw that he had been entirely wrong in his estimate of the situation, and of Hilda. Hilda was a mother. She had the protective passion of maternity. She was carried away by her passions ; but her passions were noble, marvellous, unique. He himself could never—he thought, humbled—attain to her emotional heights. He was incapable of feeling about anything or anybody as she felt about George. The revelation concerning George's eyesight had shocked her, overwhelmed her with remorse, driven

every other idea out of her head. She must atone to George instantly ; instantly she must take measures—the most drastic and certain—to secure him from the threatened danger. She could not count the cost till afterwards. She was not a woman in such moments,—she was an instinct, a desire, a ruthless purpose. And as she felt towards George, so she must feel, in other circumstances, towards himself. Her kisses proved it, and her soothing hand when he was unwell. Mrs. Hamps had said : “ Eh, dear ! What a good mother dear Hilda is ! ” A sentimental outcry ! But there was profound truth in it, truth which the old woman had seen better than he had seen it. “ I dare say there never was such a mother—unless it’s Clara ! ” Hyperbole ! And yet he himself now began to think that there never could have been such a mother as Hilda. Clara, too, in her way was wonderful. . . . Smile as you might, these mothers were tremendous. The mysterious sheen of their narrow and deep lives dazzled him. For the first time, perhaps, he bowed his head to Clara.

But Hilda was far beyond Clara. She was not only a mother but a lover. Would he cut himself off from her loving ? Why ? For what ? To live alone in the arid and futile freedom of a Tertius Ingpen ? Such a notion was fatuous. Where lay the difficulty between himself and Hilda ? There was no difficulty. How had she harmed him ? She had not harmed him. Everything was all right. He had only to understand. He understood. As for her impulsiveness, her wrong-headedness, her bizarre ratiocination,—he knew how to accept them, for was he not a philosopher ? They were indeed part of the incomparable romance of existence with these prodigious and tantalizing creatures. He admitted that Hilda in some aspects transcended him, but in others he was comfortably confident of his own steady, conquering superiority. He thought of her with the most exquisite devotion. He pictured the secret tenderness of their reunion amid the conventional gloom of Auntie Hamps’s death-bed. . . . He was confident of his ability to manage Hilda, at any rate in the big things,—for example, the disputed points of his entry into public activity and their removal from Trafalgar Road into the country. The sturdiness of the male inspired him. At the same time the thought of the dark mood from which

he had emerged obscurely perturbed him; like a fearful danger passed; and he argued to himself with satisfaction, and yet not quite with conviction, that he had yielded to Maggie, and not to Hilda, in the affair of the journey to London, and that therefore his masculine martial dignity was intact.

And then he started at a strange sound below, which somehow recalled him to the nervous tension of the house. It was a knocking at the front-door. His heart thumped at the formidable muffled noise in the middle of the night. He jumped up, and glanced at the bed. Auntie Hamps was not wakened. He went downstairs where the gas which he had lighted was keeping watch.

## CHAPTER XIX

### DEATH AND BURIAL

#### I

**A**LBERT BENBOW was at the front-door. Edwin curbed the expression of his astonishment.

"Hello, Albert!"

"Oh! You aren't gone to bed?"

"Not likely. Come in. What's up?"

Albert, with the habit of one instructed never to tread actually on a doorstep lest it should be newly whitened, stepped straight on to the inner mat. He seemed excited, and Edwin feared that he had just learnt of Auntie Hamps's illness and had come in the middle of the night ostensibly to make inquiries, but really to make a grievance of the fact that the Benbows had been 'kept in ignorance.' He could already hear Albert demanding: "Why have you kept us in ignorance?" It was quite a Benbow phrase.

Edwin shut the door and shut out the dark and windy glimpse of the outer world which had emphasized for a moment the tense seclusion of the house.

"You've heard, of course, about the accident to Ingpen?" said Albert. His hands were deep in his overcoat pockets; the collar of the thin, rather shabby overcoat was turned up; an old cap adhered to the back of his head. While talking he slowly lifted his feet one after the other, as though desiring to get warmth by stamping but afraid to stamp in the night.

"No, I haven't," said Edwin, with false calmness. "What accident?"

The perspective of events seemed to change; Auntie Hamps's illness to recede, and a definite and familiar apprehension to be supplanted by a fear more formidable because it was a fear of the unknown.

"It was all in the late special 'Signal'!" Benbow protested, as if his pride had been affronted.

"Well, I haven't seen the 'Signal' What is it?" And Edwin thought: "Is somebody else dying too?"

"Fly-wheel broke. Ingpen was inspecting the slip-house next to the engine-house. Part of the fly-wheel came through and knocked a loose nut of the blunger right into his groin."

"Whose works?"

Albert answered in a light tone:

"Mine."

"And how's he going on?"

"Well, he's had an operation and Stirling's got the nut out. Of course they didn't know what it was till they got it out. And now Ingpen wants to see you at once. That's why I've come."

"Where is he?"

"At the hospital."

"Pirehill?"

"No. The Clowes—Moorthorne Road, you know."

"Is he going on all right?"

"He's very weak. He can scarcely whisper. But he wants you. I've been up there all the time, practically."

Edwin seized his overcoat from the rack.

"I had a rare job finding ye," Benbow went on. "I'd no idea you weren't all at home. I wakened most of Hulton Street over it. It was Smiths next door came out at last and told me missis and George had gone to London and you were over here."

"I wonder who told *them*!" Edwin mumbled as Albert helped him with the overcoat. "I must tell Maggie. We've got some illness here, you know."

"Oh?"

"Yes. Auntie. Very sudden. Seemed to get worse to-night. Fact is I was sitting up while Maggie has a bit of sleep. She was going to send round for Clara in the morning. I'll just run up to Mag."

Having thus by judicious misrepresentation deprived the Benbows of a grievance, Edwin moved towards the stairs. Maggie, dressed, already stood at the top of them, alert, anxious, adequate.



“ Albert, is that you ? ”

After a few seconds of quick murmured explanation, Edwin and Albert departed, and as they went Maggie, in a voice doubly harassed but cheerful and oily, called out after them how glad she would be, and what a help it would be, if Clara could come round early in the morning.

The small Clowes Hospital was high up in the town opposite the Park, near the station and the railway-cutting and not far from the Moorthorne ridge. Behind its bushes, through which the wet night-wind swished and rustled, it looked still very new and red in the fitful moonlight. And indeed it was scarcely older than the Park and swimming-baths close by, and Bursley had not yet lost its naïve pride in the possession of a hospital of its own. Not much earlier in the decade this town of thirty-five thousand inhabitants had had to send all its ‘ cases ’ five miles in cabs to Pirehill Infirmary. Albert Benbow, with the satisfaction of a habitué, led Edwin round through an aisle of bushes to the side entrance for out-patients. He pushed open a dark door, walked into a gaslit vestibule, and with the assured gestures of a proprietor invited Edwin to follow. A fat woman who looked like a charwoman made tidy sat in a windsor-chair in the vestibule, close to a radiator. She signed to Albert as an old acquaintance to go forward, and Albert nodded in the manner of one conspirator to another. What struck Edwin was that this middle-aged woman showed no sign of being in the midst of the unusual. She was utterly casual and matter-of-fact. And Edwin had the sensation of moving in a strange nocturnal world—a world which had always co-existed with his own, but of which he had been till then most curiously ignorant. His passage through the town listening absently to Albert’s descriptions of the structural damage to Ingpen and to the works, and Albert’s defence against unbrought accusations, had shown him that the silent streets lived long after midnight in many a lighted window here and there and in the movements of mysterious but not furtive frequenters. And he seemed to have been impinging upon half-veiled enigmas of misfortune or of love. At the other end of the thread of adventure was his aunt’s harsh bedroom with Maggie stolidly watching the last ebb of senile vitality, and at this end was the hospital,

full of novel and disturbing vibrations and Tertius Ingpen waiting to impose upon him some charge or secret.

At the top of the naked stairs which came after a dark corridor was a long naked resounding passage lighted by a tiny jet at either end. A cough from behind a half-open door came echoing out and filled the night and the passage. And then at another door appeared a tall, thin, fair nurse in blue and white, with thin lips and a slight smile hard and disdainful.

"Here's Mr. Clayhanger, nurse!" muttered Albert Benbow, taking off his cap, with a grimace at once sycophantic and grandiose.

Edwin imagined that he knew by sight everybody in the town above a certain social level, but he had no memory of the face of the nurse.

"How is he?" he asked awkwardly, fingering his hat.

The girl merely raised her eyebrows.

"You mustn't stay," said she, in a mincing but rather loud voice that matched her lips.

"Oh, no, I won't!"

"I suppose I'd better stop outside!" said Benbow.

Edwin followed the nurse into a darkened room, of which the chief article of furniture appeared to be a screen. Behind the screen was a bed, and on the bed in the deep obscurity lay a form under creaseless bedclothes. Edwin first recognized Ingpen's beard, then his visage very pale and solemn, and without the customary spectacles. Of the whole body only the eyes moved. As Edwin approached the bed he cast across Ingpen a shadow from the distant gas.

"Well, old chap!" he began with constraint. "This is a nice state of affairs! How are you getting on?"

Ingpen's inquiring apprehensive dumb glance silenced the clumsy greeting. It was just as if he had been rebuked: "This is no time for How d'ye do's." When he had apparently made sure that Edwin was Edwin, Ingpen turned his eyes to the nurse.

"Water!" he whispered.

The nurse shook her head.

"Not yet," she replied, with tepid indifference.

Ingpen's eyes remained on her a moment and then went back to Edwin.

"Ed," he whispered, and gazed once more at the nurse, who, looking away from the bed, did not move.

Edwin bent over the bed.

"Ed," Ingpen recommenced, speaking very deliberately. "Go to my office. In the top drawer of the desk in the bedroom there's some photos and letters. . . . Burn them. . . . Before morning. . . . Understand?"

Edwin was profoundly stirred. In his emotion was pride at Ingpen's trust, astonishment at the sudden, utterly unexpected revelation, and the thrill of romance.

He thought :

"The man is dying!"

And the tragic sensation of the vigil of the nocturnal world almost overcame him.

"Yes," he said. "Anything else?"

"No."

"What about keys?"

Ingpen gave him another long glance.

"Trousers."

"Where are his clothes?" Edwin asked the nurse, whose lips were ironic.

"Oh! They'll tell you downstairs. You'd better go now."

As he went from the room he could feel Ingpen's glance following him. He raged inwardly against the callousness of the nurse. It seemed monstrous that he should abandon Ingpen for the rest of the night, defenceless, to the cold tyranny of the nurse, whose power over the sufferer was as absolute as that of an eastern monarch, who had never heard of public opinion, over the meanest slave. He could not bear to picture to himself Ingpen and the nurse alone together.

"Isn't he allowed to drink?" he could not help murmuring at the door.

"Yes. At intervals."

He wanted to chastise the nurse. He imagined an endless succession of sufferers under her appalling, inimical nonchalance. Who had allowed her to be a nurse? Had she become

a nurse in order to take some needed revenge against mankind? And then he thought of Hilda's passionate, succouring tenderness when he himself was unwell,—he had not been really ill for years. What was happening to Ingpen could never happen to him, because Hilda stood everlastingly between him and such a horror. He considered that a bachelor was the most pathetic creature on the earth. He was drenched in the fearful, wistful sadness of all life. . . . The sleeping town; Auntie Hamps on the edge of eternity; Minnie trembling at the menaces of her own body; Hilda lying in some room that he had never seen; and Ingpen . . . !

"Soon over!" observed Albert Benbow in the corridor.

Edwin could have winced at the words.

"How do you think he is?" asked Albert.

"Don't know!" Edwin replied. "Look here, I've got to get hold of his clothes—downstairs."

"Oh! That's it, is it? Pocket-book! Keys! Eh?"

## II

Edwin had once been in Tertius Ingpen's office at the bottom of Crown Square, Hanbridge, but never in the bedroom which Ingpen rented on the top floor of the same building. It had been for seventy or eighty years a building of four squat storeys; but a new landlord, seeing the architectural development of the town as a local metropolis and determined to join in it at a minimum of expense, had knocked the two lower storeys into one, fronted them with fawn-coloured terra-cotta, and produced a lofty shop whose rent exceeded the previous rent of the entire house.

The landlord knew that passers-by would not look higher up the façade than the ground-floor, and that therefore any magnificence above that level was merely wasted. The shop was in the occupation of a tea-dealer who gave away beautiful objects such as vases and useful objects such as tea-trays, to all purchasers. Ingpen's office and a solicitor's office, were on the first floor, formerly the second; the third floor was the headquarters of the Hanbridge and District Ethical Society; the top floor was temporarily unlet, save for Ingpen's room. Nobody except Ingpen slept in the building, and he very irregularly.

The latchkey for the side-door was easy to choose in the glittering light of the latest triple-jetted and reflectored gas-lamps which the corporation, to match the glories of the new town hall, had placed in Crown Square. The lock, strange to say, worked easily. Edwin entered somewhat furtively, and as it were guiltily, though in Crown Square and the streets and the other squares visible therefrom, not a soul could be seen. The illuminated clock of the Old Town Hall at the top of the square showed twenty-five minutes to four. Immediately within the door began a new, very long and rather mean staircase, with which Edwin was acquainted. He closed the door, shutting out the light and the town, and struck a match in the empty building. He had walked into Hanbridge from Bursley, and as soon as he began to climb the stairs he was aware of great fatigue, both physical and mental. The calamity to Ingpen had almost driven Auntie Hamps out of his mind ; it had not, however, driven Minnie out of his mind. He was gloomy and indignant on behalf of both Ingpen and Minnie. They were both victims. Minnie was undoubtedly a fool, and he was about to learn, perhaps, to what extent Ingpen had been a fool.

Each footstep sounded loud on the boards of the deserted house. Having used several matches and arrived at the final staircase, Edwin wondered how he was to distinguish Ingpen's room there from the others without trying keys in all of them till he got to the right one. But on the top landing he had no difficulty, for Ingpen's card was fastened with a drawing-pin on to the first door he saw. A match burnt his fingers and expired just as he was shaking out a likely key from Ingpen's bunch. And then, in the black darkness, he perceived a line of light under the door in front of which he stood. He forgot his fatigue in an instant. His heart leaped. A burglar ? Or had Ingpen left the gas burning ? Ingpen could not have left the gas burning since, according to Albert Benbow, he had been in Bursley all the afternoon. With precautions, and feeling very desperate and yet also craven, he lit a fresh match and managed quietly to open the door, which was not locked.

As soon as he beheld the illuminated interior of the room, all his skin crept and flushed as though he had taken a powerful



stimulant. A girl reclined asleep in a small basket lounge-chair by the gas-fire. He could not see her face, which was turned towards the wall and away from the gas-jet that hung from the ceiling over an old desk ; but she seemed slim and graceful, and there was something in the abandonment of unconsciousness that made her marvellously alluring. Her hat and gloves had been thrown on the desk, and a cloak lay on a chair. These coloured and intimate objects—extensions of the veritable personality of the girl—had the effect of delightfully completing the furniture of a room which was in fact rather bare. A narrow bed in the far corner, disguised under a green rug as a sofa ; a green square of carpet, showing the unpolished boards at the sides ; the desk, and three chairs ; a primitive hanging wardrobe in another corner, hidden by a bulging linen curtain ; a portmanteau ; a few unframed prints on the walls ; an alarm-clock on the mantelpiece,—there was nothing else in the chamber where Ingpen slept when it was too late, or he was too slack, to go to his proper home. But nothing else was needed. The scene was perfect ; the girl rendered it so. An immense envy of, and admiration for, Ingpen surged through Edwin, who saw here the realization of a dream that was to marriage what poetry is to prose. Ingpen might rail against women and against marriage in a manner exaggerated and indefensible ; but he had at any rate known how to arrange his life and how to keep his own counsel. He had all the careless masculine freedom of his condition,—and in the background this exquisite phenomenon ! The girl, her trustfulness, her abandonment, her secrecy, that white ear peeping out of her hair,—were his ! It was staggering that such romance could exist in the Five Towns, of all places—for Edwin had the vague notion, common to all natives, that his own particular district fell short of full human nature in certain characteristics. For example, he could credit a human nature dying for love in Manchester, but never in the Five Towns. Even the occasional divorces that gave piquancy to life in the Five Towns seemed to lack the mysterious glamour of all other divorces.

He thought :

“ Was it because he was expecting her that he sent me ?

Perhaps the desk was only a blind—and he couldn't tell me any more. Anyhow I shall have to break it to her."

He felt exceedingly awkward and unequal to the situation so startling in its novelty. Yet he did not wish himself away.

As timidly, hat in hand, he went forward into the room, the girl stirred and woke up, to the creaking of the chair.

"Oh! Tert!" she murmured between sleeping and waking.

Edwin did not like her voice. It reminded him of the voice of the nurse whom he had just left.

The girl, looking round, perceived that it was not Tertius Ingpen who had come in. She gave a short, faint scream, then gathered herself together and with a single movement stood up, perfectly collected and on the defensive.

"It's all right! It's all right!" said Edwin. "Mr. Ingpen gave me his keys and asked me to come over and get some papers he wants. . . . I hope I didn't frighten you. I'd no idea——"

She was old! She was old! That is to say, she was not the girl he had seen asleep. Before his marriage he would have put her age at thirty-two, but now he knew enough to be sure that she must be more than that. She was not graceful in movement. The expression of her pale face was not agreeable. Her gestures were not distinguished. And she could not act her part in the idyll. Moreover, her frock was shabby and untidy. But chiefly she was old. Had she been young, Edwin would have excused all the rest. Romance was not entirely destroyed, but very little remained.

He thought, disdainfully, and as if resenting a deception:

"Is this the best he can do?"

And the Five Towns sank back to its ancient humble place in his esteem.

The woman said with a silly nervous giggle:

"I called to see Mr. Ingpen. He wasn't expecting me. And I suppose while I was waiting I must have dropped off to sleep."

It might have been true, but to Edwin it was inexpressibly inane.

She seized her hat and then her cloak.

"I'm sorry to say Mr. Ingpen's had an accident," said Edwin.

She stopped, both hands above her head fingering her hat.

"An accident? Nothing serious?"

"Oh, no! I don't think so," he lied. "A machinery accident. They had to take him to the Clowes Hospital at Bursley. I've just come from there."

She asked one or two more questions, all the time hurrying her preparations to leave. But Edwin judged with disgust that she was not deeply interested in the accident. True, he had minimized it, but she ought not to have allowed him to minimize it. She ought to have obstinately believed that it was very grave.

"I do hope he'll soon be all right," she said, snatching at her gloves and going to the door. "Good night!" She gave another silly giggle, preposterous in a woman of her age. Then she stopped. "I think you're gentleman enough not to say anything about me being here," she said, rather nastily. "It was quite an accident. I could easily explain it, but you know what people are!"

What a phrase—"I think you're gentleman enough"!

He blushed and offered the required assurance.

"Can I let you out?" he started forward.

"No, thanks!"

"But you can't open the door."

"Yes, I can."

"The stairs are all dark."

"Please don't trouble yourself," she said dryly, in the tone of a woman who sees offence in the courtesy of a male travelling companion on the railway.

He heard her steps *diminuendo* down the stairs.

Closing the door, he went to the window, and drew aside the blind. Perhaps she would pass up the Square. But she did not pass up the Square, which was peopled by nothing but meek gas-lamps under the empire of the glowing clock in the pediment of the Old Town Hall. Where had she gone? Where did she come from? Her accent had no noticeable peculiarity. Was she married, or single, or a widow? Perhaps there was hidden in her some strange and seductive quality which he had missed. . . . He saw the slim girl again

reclining in the basket-chair. . . . After all, she was a woman, and she had been in Ingpen's room, waiting for him !

Later, seated in front of the open drawer in the old desk, gathering together letters and photographs—photographs of her in adroitly managed poses, taken at Oldham ; letters in a woman's hand—he was penetrated to the marrow by the disastrous and yet beautiful infelicity of things. The mere sight of the letters (of which he forbore to decipher a single word, even a signature) nearly made him cry ; the photographs were tragic with the intolerable evanescence of life. By the will of Tertius Ingpen helpless on the bed in the hospital, these documents of a passion or of a fancy were to be burnt. Why ? Was it true that Ingpen was dying ? Better to keep them. No, they must be burnt. He rose, and, with difficulty, burnt them by instalments in a shovel over the tiny fender that enclosed the gas-stove,—the room was soon half full of smoke. . . . Why had he deceived the woman as to the seriousness of Ingpen's accident ? To simplify and mitigate the interview, to save himself trouble ; that was all ! Well, she would learn soon enough !

His eye caught a print on the wall above the bed,—a classic example of the sentimentality of Marcus Stone : departing cavalier, drooping maiden, terraced garden. It was a dreadful indictment of the Tertius Ingpen who talked so well, with such intellectual aplomb, with such detachment and exceptional cynicism. It was like a ray exposing some secret sinister corner in the man's soul. He had hung up that print because it gave him pleasure ! Poor chap ! But Edwin loved him. He decided that he would call again at the hospital before returning to Auntie Hamps's. Impossible that the man was dying ! If the doctor or the matron had thought he was in danger they would have summoned his relatives. He might be dying. He might be dead. He must have immediately feared death, or he would not have imposed upon Edwin such an errand. . . . What simple, touching, admirable trust in a friend's loyalty the man had displayed !

Edwin put out the gas-stove, which exploded, lit a match, gave a great yawn, put out the gas, and began the enterprise of leaving the house.

## III

"Look here! I must have some tea, *now!*" said Edwin curtly and yet appealingly to Maggie, who opened the door for him at Auntie Hamps's.

It was nearly eight o'clock. He had been to the hospital again, and, having reported in three words to Ingpen, whose condition was unchanged, had remained there some time. But he had said nothing to Ingpen about the woman. At six o'clock the matron had come into the room, and the nurse thenceforward until seven o'clock, when she went off duty, was a changed girl. Edwin slightly knew the matron, who was sympathetic but strangely pessimistic—considering her healthy, full figure.

"The water's boiling," answered Maggie, in a comforting tone, and disappeared instantly into the kitchen.

Edwin thought:

"There are some things that girl understands!"

She had shown no curiosity, no desire to impart news, because she had immediately comprehended that Edwin was, or imagined himself to be, at the end of his endurance. Maggie, with simple and surpassing wisdom, had just said to herself: "He's been out all night, and he's not used to it." For a moment he felt that Maggie was wiser, and more intimately close to him, than anybody else in the world.

"In the dining-room," she called out from the kitchen.

And in the small dining-room there was a fire! It was like a living, welcoming creature. The cloth was laid, the gas was lighted. On the table was beautiful fresh bread-and-butter. A word, a tone, a glance of his on the previous evening had been enough to bring back the dining-room into use! Happily the wind suited the chimney. He had scarcely sat down in front of the fire when Maggie entered with the teapot. And at the sight of the teapot Edwin felt that he was saved. Before the tea was out of the teapot it had already magically alleviated the desperate sensations of physical fatigue and moral weariness which had almost overcome him on the way from the hospital in the chill and muddy dawn.

"What will you have to eat?" said Maggie.

"Nothing. I couldn't eat to save my life."



"Perhaps you'll have a bit of bread-and-butter later," said Maggie blandly.

He shook his head.

"How is she?"

"Worse," said Maggie. "But she's slept."

"Who's up with her now? Minnie?"

"No. Clara."

"Oh! She's come?"

"She came at seven."

Edwin was drinking the divine tea. After a few gulps he told Maggie briefly about Tertius Ingpen, saying that he had had to go 'on business' for Ingpen to Hanbridge.

"Are you all right for the present?" she asked after a few moments.

He nodded. He was eating bread-and-butter.

"You had any sleep at all?" he mumbled, munching.

"Oh, yes! A little," she answered cheerfully, leaving the room.

He poured out more tea, and then sat down in the sole easy chair for a minute's reflection before going upstairs and thence to the works.

Not until he woke up did he realize that there had been any danger of his going to sleep. The earthenware clock on the mantelpiece (a birthday gift from Clara and Albert) showed five minutes past eleven. Putting no reliance on the cheap, horrible clock, he looked at his watch, which had stopped for lack of winding up. The fire was very low. His chief thought was: "It can't possibly be eleven o'clock, because I haven't been down to the works, and I haven't sent word I'm not coming either!" He got up hurriedly and had reached the door when the sound of a voice on the stairs held him still like an enchantment. It seemed to be the voice, eloquent, and indeed somewhat Church-of-England, of the Rev. Christian Flowerdew, the new superintendent of the Bursley Wesleyan Methodist Circuit. The voice said: "I do hope so!" and then offered a resounding remark about the weather being the kind of weather that, bad as it was, people must expect in view of the time of year. Maggie's voice concurred. As soon as the front-door closed, Edwin peeped cautiously out of the dining-room.

"Who was that?" he murmured.

"Mr. Flowerdew. She wanted him. Albert sent for him early this morning."

Maggie came into the room and shut the door.

"I've been to sleep," said Edwin.

"Yes, I know. I wasn't going to have you disturbed. They're all here."

"Who are all here?"

"Clara and the children. Auntie asked to see all of them. They waited in the drawing-room for Mr. Flowerdew to go. Bert didn't go to school this morning, in case—because it was so far off. Clara fetched the others out of school except Rupy of course—he doesn't go."

"Good heavens! I never came across such a morbid lot in my life. I believe they like it."

Clara could be heard marshalling the brood up the stairs.

"You'd better go up," said Maggie persuasively.

"I'd better go to the works—I'm no use here. What time is it?"

"After eleven. I think you'd better go up."

"Does she ask for me?"

"Oh, yes. All the time sometimes. But she forgets for a bit."

"Well, anyhow I must wash myself and change my collar."

"All right. Wash yourself, then."

"How is she now?"

"She isn't taking anything."

When Edwin nervously pushed open the bedroom door, the room seemed to be crowded. Over the heads of clustering children towered Clara and Albert. As soon as the watchful Albert caught sight of Edwin, he made a conspiratorial sign and hurried to the door, driving Edwin out again.

"Didn't know you were here," Edwin muttered.

"I say," Albert whispered. "Has she made a will?"

"I don't know."

The bedroom door half opened, and Clara in her shabby morning dress glidingly joined them.

"He doesn't know," said Albert to Clara.

Clara's pretty face scowled a little as she asked sharply and resentfully:

"Then who does know?"

"I should ha' thought *you'd* know," said Edwin.

"Me! I like that! She hasn't spoken to me for months, has she, Albert? And she was always frightfully close about all these things."

"About what things?"

"Well, you know."

It was a fact. Auntie Hamps had never discussed her own finance, or her testamentary dispositions, with anybody. And nobody had ever dared to mention such subjects to her.

"Don't you think you'd better ask her?" said Clara.  
"Albert thinks you ought."

"No, I don't," said Edwin, with curt disdain.

"Well, then, I shall," Albert decided.

"So long as you don't do it while I'm there!" Edwin said menacingly. "If you want to ask people about their wills you ought to ask them before they're actually dying. Can't you see you can't worry her about her will now?"

He was intensely disgusted. He thought of Mrs. Hamps's bed, and of Tertius Ingpen's bed, and of the woman at dead of night in Ingpen's room, and of Minnie's case; and the base insensibility of Albert and Clara made him feel sick. He wondered whether any occasion would ever have solemnity enough for them to make them behave with some distinction, some grandeur. For himself, if he could have secured a fortune by breathing one business word to Auntie Hamps just then, he would have let the fortune go.

"There's nothing more to be said," Clara murmured.

In the glance of both Clara and Albert Edwin saw hatred and envy. Clara especially had never forgiven him for preventing their father from pouring money into that sieve, her husband, nor for Hilda's wounding tongue, nor for his worldly success. And they both suspected that either Maggie or Auntie Hamps had told him of Albert's default in the payment of interest, and so fear was added to their hatred and envy.

They all entered the bedroom, the children having been left alone only a few seconds. Rupert, wearing a new blue overcoat with gilt buttons, had partially scrambled on to the

bed ; the pale veined hands of Auntie Hamps could be seen round his right hand ; Rupert had grown enormous, and had already utterly forgotten the time when he was two years old. The others, equally altered, stood two on either side of the bed,—Bert and young Clara to the right, and Amy and Lucy to the left. Lucy was crying and Amy was benigantly wiping her eyes. Bert, a great lump of a boy, was to leave school at Christmas, but he was still ranked with the other children as a child. Young Clara sharply and Bert heavily turned round to witness the entrance of their elders.

“ Oh ! Here’s Uncle Edwin ! ”

“ Edwin ! ”

“ Yes, Auntie ! ”

The moral values of the room were instantly changed by the tone in which Auntie Hamps had murmured ‘ Edwin.’ All the Benbows knew, and Edwin himself knew, that a personage of supreme importance in Auntie Hamps’s eyes had come into the scene. The Benbows became secondary, and even Auntie Hamps’s grasp of Rupert’s hand loosened, and, having already kissed her, the child slipped off the bed. Edwin approached, and over the heads of the children, and between the great darkening curtains, he could at last see the face of the dying woman like a senile doll’s face amid the confusion of wrappings and bedclothes. The deep-set eyes seemed to burn beneath the white forehead and sparse grey hair ; the cheeks, still rounded, were highly flushed over a very small part of their surface ; the mouth, always open, was drawn in, and the chin, still rounded like the cheeks, protruded. The manner of Auntie Hamps’s noisy breathing, like the puzzled gaze of her eyes, indicated apprehension of the profoundest, acutest sort.

“ Eh ! ” said she, in a somewhat falsetto voice, jerky and excessively feeble. “ I thought—I’d—lost you.” Her hand was groping about.

“ No, no,” said Edwin, leaning over between young Clara and Rupert.

“ She’s feeling for your hand, Edwin,” said Clara.

He quickly took her hot, brittle fingers ; they seemed to cling to his for essential support.

“ Have you—been to the works ? ” Auntie Hamps asked

the question as though the answer to it would end all trouble.

"No," he said. "Not yet."

"Eh! That's right! That's right!" she murmured, apparently much impressed by a new proof of Edwin's wisdom.

"I've had a sleep."

"What?"

"I've been having a sleep," he repeated more loudly.

"Eh! That's right! That's right. . . . I'm so glad—the children have been to see me. . . . Amy—did you kiss me?" Auntie Hamps looked at Amy hard, as if for the first time.

"Yes, Auntie."

And then Amy began to cry.

"Better take them away," Edwin suggested aside to Albert. "It's as much as she can stand. The parson's only just gone, you know."

Albert, obedient, gave the word of command, and the room was full of movement.

"Eh, children, children!" Auntie Hamps appealed.

Everybody stood stock-still, gazing attendant.

"Eh, children—bless you all for coming! If you grow up—as good as your mother—it's all I ask—all I ask. . . . Your mother and I—have never had a cross word—have we, mother?"

"No, Auntie," said Clara, with a sweet, touching smile that accentuated the fragile charm of her face.

"Never—since mother was—as tiny as you are."

Auntie Hamps looked up at the ceiling during a few strained breaths, and then smiled for an instant at the departing children, who filed out of the room. Rupert loitered behind, gazing at his mother. The mere contrast between the infant so healthy and the dying old woman was pathetic to Edwin. Clara, with an exquisite reassuring gesture and smile, picked up the stout Rupert and kissed him and carried him to the door, while Auntie Hamps looked at mother and son ecstatic.

"Edwin!"

"Yes, Auntie?"

They were alone now. She had not loosed his hand. Her voice was very faint, and he bent over her still lower



in the alcove of the curtains, which seemed to stretch very high above them.

"Have you heard from Hilda?"

"Not yet. By the second post, perhaps."

"It's about George's eyes—isn't it?"

"Yes."

"She's done quite right—quite right. It's just—like Hilda. I do hope—and pray—the boy's eyesight—is safe."

"Oh, yes!" said Edwin. "Safe enough."

"You really think so?" She had the air of hanging on his words.

He nodded.

"What a blessing!" She sighed deeply with relief.

Edwin thought:

"I believe her relations must have been her passion." And he was impressed by the intensity of that passion.

"Edwin!"

"Yes, Auntie?"

"Has—that girl—gone yet?"

"Who?" he questioned, and added more softly: "Minnie, d'you mean?" His own voice sounded too powerful, too healthy and dominating, in comparison with her failing murmurs.

Auntie Hamps nodded. "Yes—Minnie."

"Not yet."

"She's going?"

"Yes."

"Because I can't trust—Maggie—to see to it."

"I'll see to it."

"Has she done—the silvers—d'you know?"

"She's doing them," answered Edwin, who thought it would be best to carry out the deception with artistic completeness.

"She needn't have her dinner before she goes."

"No?"

"No." Auntie Hamps's face and tone hardened. "Why should she?"

"All right."

"And if she asks—for her wages—tell her—I say there's nothing due—under the circumstances."

"All right, Auntie," Edwin agreed, desperate.

Maggie, followed by Clara, softly entered the room. Auntie Hamps glanced at them with a certain cautious suspicion, as though one or other of them was capable of thwarting her in the matter of Minnie. Then her eyes closed, and Edwin was aware of a slackening of her hold on his hand. The doctor, who called half an hour later, said that she might never speak again, and she never did. Her last conscious moments were moments of satisfaction.

Edwin slowly released his hand.

"Where's Albert?" he asked Clara, merely for the sake of saying something.

"He's taking the children home, and then he's going to the works. He ought to have gone long ago. There's a dreadful upset there."

"I suppose there is," said Edwin, who had forgotten that the fly-wheel accident must have almost brought Albert's manufactory to a standstill. And he wondered whether it was the family instinct, or anxiety about Auntie Hamps's will, that had caused Albert to absent himself from business on such a critical morning.

"I ought to go too," he muttered, as a full picture of a lithographic establishment masterless swept into his mind.

"Have you telegraphed to Hilda?" Clara demanded.

"No."

"Haven't you!"

"What's the use?"

"Well, I should have thought you would."

"Oh, no!" he said, falsely mild. "I shall write." He was immensely glad that Hilda was not present in the house to complicate still further the human equation.

Maggie was silently examining the face obscured in the gloom of the curtains.

Instead of remaining late that night at the works, Edwin came back to the house before six o'clock. He had had word that the condition of Tertius Ingpen was still unchanged. Clara had gone home to see to her children's evening meal. Maggie sat alone in the darkened bedroom, where Auntie Hamps, her features a mere pale blur between the over-arching curtains, still withheld the secret of her soul's reality

from the world. Even in the final unconsciousness there was something grandiose which lingered from her crowning magnificent deceptions and obstinate effort to safeguard the structure of society. The sublime obstinacy of the woman had transformed hypocrisy into a virtue, and not the imminence of the infinite unknown had sufficed to make her apostate to the steadfast principles of her mortal career.

"What about to-night?" Edwin asked.

"Oh! Clara and I will manage."

There was a tap at the door. Edwin opened it. Minnie, abashed but already taking courage, stood there blinking with a letter in her hand.

"Ah!" he breathed. Hilda's great scrawling caligraphy was on the envelope.

The letter read: "Darling boy, George has influenza, Charlie says. Temp. 102 anyway. So of course he can't go out to-morrow. I knew this morning there was something wrong with him. Janet and Charlie send their love.—Your ever loving wife,  
HILDA."

He was exceedingly uplifted and happy and exhausted. Hilda's handwriting moved him. The whole missive was like a personal emanation from her. It lived with her vitality. It fought for the mastery of the household interior against the mysterious, far-reaching spell of the dying woman. 'Your loving wife.' Never before, during their marriage, had she written a phrase so comforting and exciting. He thought: "My faith in her is never worthy of her." And his faith leaped up and became worthy of her.

"George has got influenza," he said indifferently.

"George! But influenza's very serious for him, isn't it?" Maggie showed alarm.

"Why should it be?"

"Considering he nearly died of it at Orgreaves'!"

"Oh! *Then!* . . . He'll be all right."

But Maggie had put fear into Edwin,—a superstitious fear. Influenza indeed might be serious for George. Suppose he died of it. People did die of influenza. Auntie Hamps—Tertius Ingpen—and now George! . . . All these anxieties mingling with his joy in the thought of Hilda! And all the brooding rooms of the house waiting in light or in darkness for a decisive event!

"I must go and lie down," he said. He could contain no more sensations.

"Do," said Maggie.

## IV

At two o'clock in the afternoon of Auntie Hamps's funeral, a procession consisting of the following people moved out of the small, stuffy dining-room of her house across the lobby into the drawing-room:—The Rev. Christian Flowerdew, the Rev. Guy Cliffe (second minister), the aged Rev. Josiah Higginbotham (supernumerary minister), the chapel and the circuit stewards, the doctor, Edwin, Maggie, Clara, Bert and young Clara (being respectively the eldest nephew and the eldest niece of the deceased), and finally Albert Benbow; Albert came last because he had constituted himself the marshal of the ceremonies. In the drawing-room the coffin with its hideous brass-plate and handles lay upon two chairs, and was covered with white wreaths. At the head of the coffin was placed a small table with a white cloth; on the cloth a large inlaid box (in which Auntie Hamps had kept odd photographs), and on the box a black book. The drawn blinds created a beautiful soft silvery gloom which solemnized everything and made even the clumsy carving on the coffin seem like the finest antique work. The three ministers ranged themselves round the small table; the others stood in an irregular horseshoe about the coffin, nervous, constrained, and in dread of catching each other's glances. Mr. Higginbotham, by virtue of his age, began to read the service, and Auntie Hamps became 'she,' 'her,' and 'our sister'—nameless. In the dining-room she had been the paragon of all excellences,—in the drawing-room, packed securely and neatly in the coffin, she was a sinner snatched from the consequences of sin by a miracle of divine sacrifice.

The interment thus commenced was the result of a compromise between two schools of funebrial manners sharply divergent. Edwin, immediately after the demise, had become aware of influences far stronger than those which had shaped the already half-forgotten interment of old Darius Clayhanger into a form repugnant to him. Both Albert and Clara, but especially Albert, had assumed an elaborate funeral, with a choral service at the Wesleyan Chapel, numer-

ous guests, a superb procession, and a substantial and costly meal in the drawing-room to conclude. Edwin had at once and somewhat domineeringly decided : no guests whatever outside the family, no service at the chapel, every rite reduced to its simplest. When asked why, he had no logical answer. He soon saw that it would be impossible not to invite a minister and the doctor. He yielded, intimidated by the sacredness of custom. Then not only the Wesleyan Chapel but its Sunday school sent dignified emissaries, who so little expected a No to their honorific suggestions that the No was unuttered and unutterable. Certain other invitations were agreed upon. The Sunday school announced that it would 'walk,' and prepared to 'walk.'

All the emissaries spoke of Auntie Hamps as a saint ; they all averred with restrained passion that her death was an absolutely irreparable loss to the circuit ; and their apparent conviction was such that Edwin's whole estimate of Auntie Hamps and of mankind was momentarily shaken. Was it conceivable that none of these respectable people had arrived at the truth concerning Auntie Hamps ? Had she deceived them all ? Or were they simply rewarding her in memory for her ceaseless efforts on behalf of the safety of society ?

Edwin stood like a rock against a service in the Wesleyan Chapel. Clara cunningly pointed out to him that the Wesleyan Chapel would be heated for the occasion, whereas the chapel at the cemetery, where scores of persons had caught their deaths in the few years of its existence, was never heated. His reply showed genius. He would have the service at the house itself. The decision of the chief mourner might be regretted, and was regretted, but none could impugn its correctitude, nor its social distinction ; some said approvingly that it was 'just like' Edwin. Thenceforward the arrangements went more smoothly, the only serious difficulty being about the route to the cemetery. Edwin was met by a saying that 'the last journey must be the longest' : which meant that the cortège must go up St. Luke's Square and along the Market Place past the Town Hall and the Shambles, encountering the largest number of sightseers, instead of taking the nearest way along Wedgwood Street. Edwin chose Wedgwood Street.



In the discussions, Maggie was neutral, thus losing part of the very little prestige which she possessed. Clara and Albert considered Edwin to be excessively high-handed. But they were remarkably moderate in criticism, for the reason that no will had been found. Maggie and Clara had searched the most secret places of the house for a will, in vain. All that they had found was a brass and copper paper-knife wrapped in tissue-paper and labelled 'For Edwin, with Auntie's love,' and a set of tortoise-shell combs equally wrapped in tissue-paper and labelled 'For Maggie, with Auntie's love.' Naught for Clara! Naught for the chicks!

Albert (who did all the running about) had been to see Mr. Julian Pidduck, the Wesleyan solicitor, who had a pew at the back of the chapel and was famous for invariably arriving at morning service half an hour late. Mr. Pidduck knew of no will. Albert had also been to the Bank—that is to say, *the* Bank, at the top of St. Luke's Square, whose former manager had been a buttress of Wesleyanism. The new manager (after nearly eight years he was still called the 'new' manager, because the previous manager, old Lovatt, had been in control for nearly thirty years), Mr. Breeze, was ill upstairs on the residential floor with one of his periodic attacks of boils; the cashier, however, had told Albert that certain securities, but no testament, were deposited at the Bank; he had offered to produce the securities, but only to Edwin, as the nearest relative. Albert had then secretly looked up the pages entitled "Intestates' Estates" in "Whitaker's Almanack" and had discovered that whereas Auntie Hamps being intestate, her personal property would be divided equally between Edwin, Maggie, and Clara, her real property would go entirely to Edwin. (Edwin also had secretly looked up the same pages.) This gross injustice nearly turned Albert from a Tory into a Land Laws reformer. It accounted for the comparative submissiveness of Clara and Albert before Edwin's arrogance as the arbiter of funerals. They hoped that, if he was humoured, he might forgo his rights. They could not credit, and Edwin maliciously did not tell them, that no matter what they did he was incapable of insisting on such rights.

While the ministers succeeded each other in the conduct

of the service, each after his different manner, Edwin scrutinized the coffin, and the wreaths, and the cards inscribed with mournful ecstatic affection that nestled amid the flowers, and the faces of the audience, and his thought was: "This will soon be over now!" Beneath his gloomy and wearied expression he was unhappy, but rather hopeful and buoyant, looking forward to approaching felicity. His reflections upon the career of Auntie Hamps were kind, and utterly uncritical; he wondered what her spirit was doing in that moment. The mystery ennobled his mind. Yet he wondered also whether the ministers believed all they were saying, why the superintendent minister read so well and prayed with such a lack of distinction, how much the wreaths cost, whether the Sunday-school deputation had silently arrived in the street, and why men in overcoats and hatless looked so grotesque in a room, and why, when men and women were assembled on a formal occasion, the women always clung together.

Probing his left-hand pocket, he felt a letter. He had received it that morning from Hilda. George was progressing very well, and Charlie Orgreave had actually brought the oculist with his apparatus to see him at Charlie's house. Charlie would always do impossibilities for Hilda. It was Charlie who had once saved George's life—so Hilda was convinced. The oculist had said that George's vision was normal, and that he must not wear glasses, but that on account of a slight weakness he ought to wear a shade at night in rooms which were lighted from the top. In a few days Hilda and George would return. Edwin anticipated their arrival with an impatience almost gleeful, so anxious was he to begin the new life with Hilda. Her letters had steadily excited him. He pictured the intimacies of their reunion. He saw her ideally. His mind rose to the finest manifestations of her individuality, and the inconveniences of that individuality grew negligible. Withal, he was relieved that George's illness had kept her out of Bursley during the illness, death, and burial of Auntie Hamps. Had she been there, he would have had three persons to manage instead of two, and he could not have asserted himself with the same freedom.

And then there was a sound of sobbing outside the door. Minnie, sharing humbly but obstinately in the service accord-

ing to her station, had broken down in irrational grief at the funeral of the woman whose dying words amounted to an order for her execution. Edwin, though touched, could have smiled; and he felt abashed before the lofty and incomprehensible marvels of human nature. Several outraged bent heads twisted round in the direction of the door, but the minister intrepidly continued with the final prayer. Maggie slipped out, the door closed, and the sound of sobbing receded.

After the benediction Albert resumed full activity, while the remainder of the company stared and cleared their throats without exchanging a word. The news that the hearse and coaches had not arrived helped them to talk a little. The fault was not that of the undertaker, but Edwin's. The service had finished too soon, because in response to Mr. Flowerdew's official question: "How much time do you give me?" he had replied: "Oh! A quarter of an hour," whereas Albert the organizer had calculated upon half an hour. The representatives of the Sunday school were already lined up on the pavement, and on the opposite pavement and in the roadway were knots of ragged, callously inquisitive spectators. The vehicles could at length be described on the brow of Church Street. They descended the slope in haste. The four mutes nipped down with agility from the hammercloths, hung their greasy top-hats on the ornamental spikes of the hearse, and sneaked grimly into the house. In a second the flowers were shifted from the coffin, and with startling accomplished swiftness the coffin was darted out of the room without its fraudulent brass handles even being touched, and down the steps into the hearse, and the flowers replaced. The one hitch was due to Edwin attempting to get into the first coach instead of waiting for the last one. Albert, putting on his new black gloves, checked him. The ministers and the doctor had to go first, the chapel officials next, and the chief mourners—Edwin, Albert, and Bert—had the third coach. The women stayed behind at the door, frowning at the murmurous crowd of shabby idlers. Albert gave a supreme glance at the vehicles and the walkers, made a signal, and joined Edwin and Bert in the last coach, buttoning his left-hand glove. Edwin would

only hold his gloves in his hand. The cortège moved. Rain was threatening, and the street was muddy.

At the cemetery it was raining, and the walkers made a string of glistening umbrellas ; only the paid mutes had no umbrellas. Near the gates, under an umbrella, stood a man with a protruding chin and a wiry grey moustache. He came straight to Edwin and shook hands. It was Mr. Breeze, the bank-manager. His neck, enveloped in a white muffler, showed a large excrescence behind, and he kept his head very carefully in one position.

He said, in his defiant voice :

“ I only had the news this morning, and I felt that I should pay the last tribute of respect to the deceased. I had known her in business and privately for many years.”

His greeting of Albert was extremely reserved, and Albert showed him a meek face. Albert's overdraft impaired the cordiality of their relations.

“ Sorry to hear you've got your old complaint ! ” said Edwin, astounded at this act of presence by the terrible bank-manager.

Vehicles, by some municipal caprice, were forbidden to enter the cemetery. And in the rain, between the stone-perpetuated great names of the town's history—the Boultons, the Lawtons, the Blackshaws, the Beardmores, the Dunns, the Longsons, the Hulmes, the Suttons, the Greenes, the Gardiners, the Calverts, the Dawsons, the Brindleys, the Baineses, and the Woods—the long procession preceded by Auntie Hamps tramped for a third of a mile along the asphalted path winding past the chapel to the graveside. And all the way Mr. Breeze, between Edwin and Albert, with Bert a yard to the rear, talked about boils, and Edwin said Yes and No, and Albert said nothing. And at the graveside the three ministers removed their flat round hats and put on skull-caps, while skilfully holding their umbrellas aloft.

And while Mr. Flowerdew was reading from a little book in the midst of the large, encircling bare-headed crowd with umbrellas, and the grave digger with absolute precision accompanied his words with three castings of earth into the hollow of the grave, Edwin scanned an adjoining tombstone, which marked the family vault of Isaac Plant, a renowned citizen. He read, chased in gilt letters on the Aberdeen granite, the

following lines : " Sacred to the memory of Adelaide Susan, wife of Isaac Plant, died 27th June, 1886, aged 47 years. And of Mary, wife of Isaac Plant, died 11th December, 1890, aged 33 years. And of Effie Harriet, wife of Isaac Plant, died 9th December, 1893, aged 27 years. *The Flower Fadeth.* And of Isaac Plant, died 9th February, 1894, aged 79 years. *I know that my Redeemer Liveth.*" And the passionate career of the aged and always respectable rip seemed to Edwin to have been a wondrous thing. The love of life was in Isaac Plant. He had risen above death again and again. After having detested him, Edwin now liked him on the tombstone.

And even in that hilly and bleak burial-ground, with melancholy sepulchral parties and white wind-blown surplises dotted about the sodden slopes, and the stiff antipathetic multitude around the pit which held Auntie Hamps, and the terrible seared, harsh, grey-and-brown industrial landscape of the great smoking amphitheatre below, Edwin felt happy in the sensation of being alive and of having to contend with circumstance. He was inspired by the legend of Isaac Plant and of Auntie Hamps, who in very different ways had intensely lived. And he thought in the same mood of Tertius Ingpen, who was now understood to be past hope. If he died—well, he also had intensely lived ! And he thought, too, of Hilda, whose terrific vitality of emotion had caused him such hours of apprehension and exasperation. He exulted in all those hours. It seemed almost a pity that, by reason of his new-found understanding of Hilda, such hours would not recur. His heart flew impatiently forward into the future, to take up existence with her again.

When the ministers pocketed their skull-caps and resumed their hats, everybody except Edwin appeared to feel relief in turning away from the grave. Faces brightened ; footsteps were more alert. In the drawing-room Edwin had thought : " It will soon be over," and every face near him was saying, " It is over " ; but now that it was over Edwin had a pang of depression at the eagerness with which all the mourners abandoned Auntie Hamps to her strange and desolate grave amid the sinister population of corpses.

He lingered, glancing about. Mr. Breeze also lingered, and then in his downright manner squarely approached Edwin.



"I'll walk down with ye to the gates," said he.

"Yes," said Edwin.

Mr. Breeze moved his head round with care. Their umbrellas touched. In front of them the broken units of a procession tramped in disorder, chatting.

"I've got that will for you," said Mr. Breeze in a confidential tone.

"What will?"

"Mrs. Hamps's."

"But your cashier said there was no will at your place!"

"My cashier doesn't know everything," remarked Mr. Breeze. And in his voice was the satisfied grimness of a true native of the district, and a Longshaw man. "Mrs. Hamps deposited her will with me as much as a friend as anything else. The fact is, I had it in my private safe. I should have called with it this morning, but I knew that you'd be busy, and what's more, I can't go paying calls of a morning. Here it is."

Mr. Breeze drew an endorsed foolscap envelope from the breast pocket of his overcoat, and handed it to Edwin.

"Thanks," said Edwin very curtly. He could be as native as any native. But beneath the careful imperturbability of his demeanour he was not unagitated.

"I've got a receipt for you to sign," said Mr. Breeze. "It's slipped into the envelope. Here's an ink-pencil."

Edwin comprehended that he must stand still in the rain and sign a receipt for the will as best he could under an umbrella. He complied. Mr. Breeze said no more.

"Good-bye, Mr. Breeze," said Edwin at the gates.

"Good day to you, Mr. Clayhanger."

The coaches trotted down the first part of the hill into Bursley, but as soon as the road became a street, with observant houses on either side, the pace was reduced to a proper solemnity. Edwin was amused and even uplifted by the thought of the will in his pocket; his own curiosity concerning it diverted him; he anticipated complications with a light heart. To Albert he said nothing on the subject, which somehow he could not bring himself to force bluntly into the conversation. Albert talked about his misfortunes at the works, including the last straw of the engine accident; and

all the time he was vaguely indicating reasons—the presence of Bert in the carriage necessitated reticence—for his default in the interest-paying to Maggie. At intervals he gave out that he was expecting much from Bert, who at the New Year was to leave school for the works—and Bert, taciturn behind his spectacles, had to seem loyal, earnest, and promising.

As they approached the Clowes Hospital Edwin saw a nurse in a bonnet, white bow, and fluent blue robe emerging from the shrubbery and putting up an umbrella. She looked delightful,—at once modest and piquant, until he saw that she was the night-nurse; and even then she still looked delightful. He thought: “I’d no idea she could look like that!” and began to admit to himself that perhaps in his encounters with her in the obscurity of the night he had not envisaged the whole of her personality. Involuntarily he leaned forward. Her eyes were scintillant and active, and they caught his. He saluted; she bowed, with a most inviting, challenging, and human smile.

“There’s Nurse Faulkner!” he exclaimed to Albert. “I must just ask her how Ingpen is. I haven’t heard to-day.” He made as if to lean out of the window.

“But you can’t stop the procession!” Albert protested in horror, unable to conceive such an enormity.

“I’ll just slip out!” said Edwin guiltily.

He spoke to the coachman, and the coach halted.

In an instant he was on the pavement.

“Drive on,” he instructed the coachman; and to the outraged Albert: “I’ll walk down.”

Nurse Faulkner, apparently flattered by the proof of her attractiveness, stopped and smiled upon the visitor. She had a letter in one hand.

“Good afternoon, nurse.”

“Good morning, Mr. Clayhanger. I’m just going out for my morning walk before breakfast,” said she.

She had dimples. These dimples quite ignored Edwin’s mourning and the fact that he had quitted a funeral in order to speak to her.

“How is Mr. Ingpen to-day?” Edwin asked. He could read on the envelope in her hand the words “The Rev.”

She grew serious, and said in a low, cheerful tone : " I think he's going on pretty well."

Edwin was startled.

" D'you mean he's getting better ? "

" Slowly. He's taking food more easily. He was undoubtedly better this morning. I haven't seen him since, of course."

" But the matron seemed to think——" He stopped, for the dimples began to reappear.

" Matron always fears the worst, you know," said Nurse Faulkner, not without irony.

" Does she ? "

The matron had never held out hope to Edwin, and he had unquestioningly accepted her opinion. It had not occurred to him that the matron of a hospital could be led astray by her instinctive, unconscious appetite for gloom and disaster.

The nurse nodded.

" Then you think he'll pull through ? "

" I'm pretty sure he will. But of course I've not seen the doctor—I mean since the first night."

" I'm awfully glad."

" His brother came over from Darlington to see him yesterday evening, you know."

" Yes. I just missed him."

The nurse gave a little bow as she moved up the road.

" Just going to the pillar-box," she explained. " Dreadful weather we're having ! "

He left her, feeling that he had made a new acquaintance.

" She's in love with a parson, I bet," he said to himself. And he had to admit that she had charm—when off duty.

The news about Ingpen filled him with bright joy. Everything was going well. Hilda would soon be home ; George's eyes were not seriously wrong ; the awful funeral was over ; and his friend was out of danger—marvellously restored to him. Then he thought of the will. He glanced about to see whether anybody of importance was observing him. There was nobody. The coaches were a hundred yards in front. He drew out the envelope containing the will, managed to extract the will from the envelope, and opened the document, —not very easily because he was holding his umbrella. A small printed slip fluttered to the muddy pavement. He

picked it up; it was a printed form of attestation clause, seemingly cut from "Whitaker's Almanack": "Signed by the testator (or testatrix as the case may be) in the presence of us, both present at the same time," etc.

"She's got that right, anyhow," he murmured.

Then, walking along he read the will of Auntie Hamps. It was quickly spotted with raindrops.

At the house the blinds were drawn up, and the women sedately cheerful. Maggie was actually teasing Bert about his new hat, and young Clara, active among the preparations for tea for six, was intensely and seriously proud at being included in the ceremonial party of adults. She did not suspect that the adults themselves had a novel sensation of being genuinely adult, and that the last representative of the older generation was gone, and that this common sensation drew them together rather wistfully.

"Oh! By the way, there's a telegram for you," said Maggie, as Minnie left the dining-room after serving the last trayful of hot dishes and pots.

Edwin took the telegram. It was from Hilda, to say that she and George would return on the morrow.

"But what about the house being cleaned, and what about servants?" cried Edwin, affecting, in order to conceal his pleasure, an annoyance which he did not in the least feel.

"Oh! Mrs. Tams has been looking after the house—I shall go round and see her after tea. I've got one servant for Hilda."

"You never told me anything about it," said Edwin, who was struck, by no means for the first time, by the concealment which all the women practised.

"Didn't I?" Maggie innocently murmured. "And then Minnie can go and help if necessary until you're all settled again. Hadn't we better have the gas lighted before we begin?"

And in the warm cosiness of the small, ugly dining-room shortly to be profaned by auctioneers and furniture-removers, amid the odours of tea and hot tea-cakes, and surrounded by the family faces intimate, beloved and disdained, Edwin had an exciting vision of the new life with Hilda, and the vision was shot through with sharp flitting thoughts of the once gorgeous Auntie Hamps forlorn in the cemetery and already passing into oblivion.

After tea, immediately the children had been sent home, he said, self-consciously, to Albert :

"I've got something for you."

And offered the will. Maggie and Clara were upstairs.

"What is it?"

"It's Auntie's will. Breeze had it. He gave it to me in the cemetery. It seems he only knew this morning Auntie was dead. I think that was why he came up."

"Well, I'm——!" Albert muttered.

His hand trembled as he opened the paper.

Auntie Hamps had made Edwin sole executor, and had left all her property in trust for Clara's children. Evidently she had reasoned that Edwin and Maggie had all they needed, and that the children of such a father as Albert could only be effectually helped in one way, which way she had chosen. The will was seven years old, and the astounding thing was that she had drawn it herself, having probably copied some of the wording from some source unknown. It was a wise if a rather ruthless will; and its provisions, like the manner of making it, were absolutely characteristic of the testatrix. Too mean to employ a lawyer, she had yet had a magnificent gesture of generosity towards that Benbow brood which she adored in her grandiose way. And, further, she had been clever enough not to invalidate the will by some negligent informality. It was as tight as if Julian Pidduck himself had drawn it.

And she had managed to put Albert in a position highly exasperating. For he was both very pleased and very vexed. In slighting him, she had aggrandized his children.

"What of it?" he asked nervously.

"It's all right so far as I'm concerned," said Edwin, with a short laugh. And he was sincere, for he had no desire whatever to take a share of his aunt's modest wealth. He shrank from the trusteeship, but he knew that he could not avoid it, and he was getting accustomed to power and dominion. Albert would have to knuckle down to him, and Clara too.

Maggie and Clara came back together into the room, noticeably sisterly. They perceived at once from the men's faces that they were in the presence of an historic event.

"I say, Clary," Albert began; his voice quavered.



## CHAPTER XX

### THE DISCOVERY

#### I

**H**ILDA showed her smiling, flattering face at the door of Edwin's private office at a few minutes to one on Saturday morning, and she said :

"I had to go to the dressmaker's after my shopping, so I thought I might as well call for you." She added with deference : "But I can wait if you're busy."

True that the question of mourning had taken her to the dressmaker's, and that the dressmaker lived in Shawport Lane, not four minutes from the works ; but such accidents had nothing to do with her call, which, being part of a scheme of Hilda's, would have occurred in any case.

"I'm ready," said Edwin, pleased by the vision of his wife in the stylish wide-sleeved black jacket and black hat which she had bought in London. "What have you got in that parcel ?"

"It's your new office-coat," Hilda replied, depositing on the desk the parcel which had been partly concealed behind her muff. "I've mended the sleeves."

"Aha !" Edwin lightly murmured. "Let's have a look at it."

His benevolent attitude towards the new office-coat surprised and charmed her. Before her journey to London with George he would have jealously resented any interfering hand among his apparel, but since her return he had been exquisitely amenable. She thought, proud of herself :

"It's really quite easy to manage him. I never used to go quite the right way about it."

Her new system, which was one of the results of contact with London and which had been inaugurated a week earlier on the platform of Knype station when she stepped down

from the London train, consisted chiefly in smiles, voice-control, and other devices to make Edwin believe in any discussion that she fully appreciated his point of view. Often (she was startled to find) this simulation had the unexpected result of causing her actually to appreciate his point of view. Which was very curious.

London indeed had had its effect on Hilda. She had seen the Five Towns from a distance, and as something definitely provincial. Having lived for years at Brighton, which is almost a suburb of London, and also for a short time in London itself, she could not think of herself as a provincial, in the full sense in which Edwin, for example, was a provincial. She had gone to London with her son, not like a staring and intimidated provincial, but with the confidence of an initiate returning to the scene of initiation. And once she was there, all her old condescensions towards the dirty and primitive ingenuous Five Towns had very quickly revived. She discovered Charlie Orgreave, the fairly successful doctor in Ealing (a suburb rich in doctors), to be the perfect Londoner, and Janet, no longer useless and forlorn, scarcely less so. These two, indeed, had the air of having at length reached their proper home after being born in exile. The same was true of Johnnie Orgreave, now safely through the matrimonial court and married to his blonde Adela (formerly the ripping Mrs. Chris Hamson), whose money had bought him a junior partnership in an important architectural firm in Russell Square. Johnnie and Adela had come over from Bedford Park to Ealing to see Hilda, and Hilda had dined with them at Bedford Park at a table illuminated by crimson-shaded night-lights,—a repast utterly different in its appointments and atmosphere from anything conceivable in Trafalgar Road. The current Five Towns notion of Johnnie and his wife as two morally ruined creatures hiding for the rest of their lives in shame from an outraged public opinion, seemed merely comic in Ealing and Bedford Park. These people referred to the Five Towns with negligent affection, but with disdain, as to a community that, with all its good qualities, had not yet emerged from barbarism. They assumed that their attitude was also Hilda's, and Hilda, after a moment's secret resentment, had indeed made their attitude her own. When

she mentioned that she hoped soon to move Edwin into a country house, they applauded and implied that no other course was possible. Withal, their respect, to say nothing of their regard, for Edwin, the astute and successful man of business, was obvious and genuine. The two brothers Orgreave, amid their possibly superficial splendours of professional men, hinted envy of the stability of Edwin's trade position. And both Janet and Adela, shopping with Hilda, showed her, by those inflexions and eyebrow-liftings of which women possess the secret, that the wife of a solid and generous husband had quite as much economic importance in London as in the Five Towns.

Thus when Hilda got into the train at Euston, she had in her head a plan of campaign compared to which the schemes entertained by her on the afternoon of the disastrous servants' episode seemed amateurish and incomplete. And also she was like a returning adventurer, carrying back to his savage land the sacred torch of civilization. She had perceived, as never before, the superior value of the suave and refined social methods of the metropolitan middle-classes, compared with the manners of the Five Towns, and it seemed to her, in her new enthusiasm for the art of life, that if she had ever had a difficulty with Edwin, her own clumsiness was to blame. She saw Edwin as an instrument to be played upon, and herself as a virtuoso. In such an attitude was necessarily a condescension. Yet this condescension somehow did not in the least affect the tenderness and the fever of her longing for Edwin. Her excitement grew as the train passed across the dusky December plain towards him. She thought of the honesty of his handshake and of his wistful glance. She knew that he was better than any of the people she had left, —either more capable, or more reliable, or more charitable, or all three. She knew that most of the people she had left were at heart snobs. "Am I getting a snob?" she asked herself. She had asked herself the question before. "I don't care if it is snobbishness. I want certain things, and I will have them, and they can call it what they like." Like the majority of women, she was incapable of being frightened by the names of her desires. She might be snobbish in one part of her, but in another she had the fiercest scorn for all

that Ealing stood for. And in Edwin she admired nothing more than the fact that success had not modified his politics, which were as downright as they had ever been ; she could not honestly say the same for herself ; and assuredly the Orgreaves could not say the same for themselves. In politics, Edwin was an inspiration to her.

And when the train entered the fiery zone of industry, and slackened speed amid the squalid twilit streets, and stopped at Knype station in front of a crowd of local lowering faces and mackintoshed and gaitered forms, and the damp chill of the Five Towns came in through the opened door of the compartment, her heart fell, and she regretted the elegance of Ealing. But simultaneously her heart was beating with ecstatic expectation. She saw Edwin's face. It was a local face. He wore mourning. He saw her ; his eye lighted ; his wistful smile appeared. " Yes," she thought, " he is the same as my image of him. He is better than any of them. I am safe. What a shame to have left him all alone ! He was quite right—there was no need for it. But I am so impulsive. He must have suffered terribly with those Benbows, and shut out of his own house too." . . . His hand thrilled her. In the terrible sincerity and outpouring of her kiss she sought to compensate him for all wrongs past and future. Her joy in being near him again made her tingle. His matter-of-fact calmness pleased her. She thought : " I know him, with his matter-of-fact calmness ! " " Hello, kid," Edwin addressed George with man-to-man negligence. " Been looking after your mother ? " George answered like a Londoner. She had them side by side. It was the fact that George had looked after her. London had matured him ; he had picked up a little Ealing. He was past Edwin's shoulder. Indeed he was surprisingly near to being a man. She had both of them. On the platform they surrounded her with their masculine protection. George's secret deep respect for Edwin was not hidden from her.

And yet, all the time, in her joy, reliance, love, admiration, eating him with her eyes, she was condescending to Edwin, —because she had plans for his good. She knew better than he did what would be for his good. And he was a provincial and didn't suspect it. " My poor boy ! " she had said gleefully

in the cab, pulling suddenly at a loose button of the old grey coat which he wore surreptitiously under his new black overcoat. "My poor boy, what a state you are in!" implying in her tone of affectionate raillery that without her he was a lost man. Through this loose button, she was his mother, his good angel, his saviour. The trifle had led to a general visitation of his wardrobe, conducted by her with metropolitan skill in humouring his susceptibilities.

Edwin now tried on the new office-coat with the self-consciousness that none but an odious dandy can avoid on such occasions.

"It seems warmer than it used to be," he said, pleased to have her beholding him and interesting herself in him, especially in his office. Her presence there, unless it happened to arouse his jealousy for his business independence, always pleasurably excited him. Her muff on the desk had the air of being the muff of a woman who was amorously interested in him, but his relations with whom were not regularized by the law or the church.

"Yes," said she. "I've put some wash-leather inside the lining at the back."

"Why?"

"Well, didn't you say you felt the cold from the window, and it's bad for your liver?"

Her glance said:

"Am I not a clever woman?"

And his replied:

"You are."

"That's the end of that, I hope, darling," she remarked, picking up the old office-coat and dropping it with charming affected disgust into the waste-paper basket.

He shouted for the clerk, who entered with some letters for signature. Under the eyes of his wife Edwin signed them with the demeanour of a secretary of state signing the destiny of provinces, while the clerk respectfully waited.

"I've asked Maggie to come up for the week-end," said Hilda carelessly, when they were alone together, and Ed in was straightening the desk preparatory to departure.

Since her return she had become far more friendly with Maggie than ever before,—not because Maggie had revealed



any new charm, but because she saw in Maggie a victim of injustice. Nothing during the week had more severely tested Hilda's new methods of intercourse with Edwin than the disclosure of the provisions of Auntie Hamps's will, which she had at once and definitely set down as monstrous. She simply could not comprehend Edwin's calm acceptance of them, and a month earlier she would have been bitter about it. It was not (she was convinced) that she coveted money, but that she hated unfairness. Why should the Benbows have all Auntie Hamps's possessions, and Edwin and Maggie, who had done a thousand times more for her than the Benbows, nothing? Hilda's conversation implied that the Benbows ought to be ashamed of themselves, and when Edwin pointed out that their good luck was not their fault, only a miracle of self-control had enabled her to say nicely: "That's quite true," instead of sneering: "That's you all over, Edwin!" When she learnt that Edwin would receive not a penny for his labours as executor and trustee for the Benbow children, she was speechless. Perceiving that he did not care for her to discourse upon what she considered to be the wrong done to him, she discoursed upon the wrong done to Maggie—Maggie who was already being deprived by the wicked Albert of interest due to her. And Edwin had to agree with her about Maggie's case. It appeared that Maggie also agreed with her about Maggie's case. As for the Benbows, Hilda had not deigned to say one word to them on the matter. A look, a tone, a silence, had sufficed to express the whole of Hilda's mind to those Benbows.

"Oh!" said Edwin. "So Maggie's coming for the weekend, is she? Well, that's not a bad scheme." He knew that Maggie had been very helpful about servants, and that, the second servant having not yet arrived, she would certainly do much more work in the house than she 'made.' He pictured her and Hilda becoming still more intimate as they turned sheets and blankets and shook pillows on opposite sides of beds, and he was glad.

"Yes," said Hilda. "I've called there this morning."

"And what's she doing with Minnie?"

"We've settled all that," said Hilda proudly. Edwin had told her in detail the whole story of Minnie, and she had be-

haved exactly as he had anticipated. Her championship of Minnie had been as passionate as her ruthless verdict upon Minnie's dead mistress. "The girl's aunt was there when I called. We've settled she is to go to Stone, and Maggie and I shall do something for her, and when it's all over I may take her on as housemaid. Maggie says she probably wouldn't make a bad housemaid. Anyhow it's all arranged for the present."

"Then Maggie'll be without a servant?"

"No, she won't. We shall manage that. Besides, I suppose Maggie won't stay on in that house all by herself for ever! . . . It's just the right size, I see."

"Just!" said Edwin.

He was spreading over his desk a dust-sheet with a red scalloped edging which Hilda had presented to him three days earlier.

She gazed at him with composed and justifiable self-satisfaction, as if saying: "Leave absolutely to me everything in my department, and see how smooth your life will be!"

He would never praise her, and she had a very healthy appetite for praise, which appetite always went hungry. But now, instead of resenting his niggardly reserve, she said to herself: "Poor boy! He can't bring himself to pay compliments; that's it. But his eyes are full of delicious compliments." She was happy, even if apprehensive for the immediate future. There she was, established and respected in his office, which was his church and the successful rival of her boudoir. Her plans were progressing.

She approached the real business of her call:

"I was thinking we might have gone over to see Ingpen this afternoon."

"Well, let's."

Ingpen, convalescent, had insisted, two days earlier, on being removed to his own house, near the village of Stockbrook, a few miles south of Axe. The departure was a surprising example of the mere power of volition on the part of a patient. The routine of hospital life had exasperated the recovering soul of this priest of freedom to such a point that doctor, matron, and friends had had to yield to a mere instinct.

"There's no decent train to go, and none at all to come

back until nearly nine o'clock. And we can't cycle in this weather—at least I can't, especially in the dark."

"Well, what about Sunday?"

"The Sunday trains are worse."

"What a ghastly line!" said Edwin. "And they have the cheek to pay five per cent. I remember Ingpen telling me there was one fairish train into Knype in the morning, and one out in the afternoon. And there wouldn't be that if the Locomotive Superintendent didn't happen to live at Axe."

"It's a pity you haven't got a dog-cart, isn't it?" said Hilda, lightly smiling. "Because then we could use the works horse now and then, and it wouldn't really cost anything extra, would it?"

Her heart was beating perceptibly.

Edwin shook his head, agreeably, but with firmness.

"Can't mix up two different things like that!" he said.

She knew it. She was aware of the whole theory of horse-owning among the upper trading-class in the Five Towns. A butcher might use his cob for pleasure on Sundays—he never used it for pleasure on any other day—but traders on a higher plane than butchers drew between the works and the house a line which a works horse was not permitted to cross. One or two, perhaps—but not the most solid—would put a carter into a livery overcoat and a shabby top-hat and describe him as a coachman while on rare afternoons he drove a landau or a victoria picked up cheap at Axe or Market Drayton. But the majority had no pretensions to the owning of private carriages. The community was not in fact a carriage community. Even the Orgreaves had never dreamed of a carriage. Old Darius Clayhanger would have been staggered into profanity by the suggestion of such a thing. Indeed, until some time after old Clayhanger's death the printing business had been content to deliver all its orders in a boy-pushed handcart. Only when Edwin discovered that, for instance, two thousand catalogues on faced clay paper could not be respectably delivered in a handcart, had he steeled himself to the prodigious move of setting up a stable. He had found an entirely trustworthy ostler-carter with the comfortable name of Unchpin, and, an animal and a trades-

man's covered cart having been bought, he had left the affair to Unchpin. Naturally he had never essayed to drive the tradesman's cart. An Edwin Clayhanger could not be seen on the insecure box of a tradesman's cart. He had learnt nothing about horses except that a horse should be watered before, and not after, being fed, that shoeing cost a shilling a week and fodder a shilling a day, and that a horse driven over a hundred and fifty miles a week was likely to get 'a bit over' at the knees. At home the horse and cart had always been regarded as being just as exclusively a works item as the printing-machines or the steam-engine.

"I suppose," said Hilda carefully, "you've got all the work one horse can do?"

"*And* more."

"Well, then, why don't you buy another one?" She tried to speak carelessly, without genuine interest.

"Yes, no doubt!" Edwin answered dryly. "And build fresh stables, too."

"Haven't you got room for two?"

"Come along and look, and then perhaps you'll be satisfied."

Buzzers, syrens, and whistles began to sound in the neighbourhood. It was one o'clock.

"Shall I? . . . Your overcoat collar's turned up behind. Let me do it."

She straightened the collar.

They went out, through the clerk's office. Edwin gave a sideways nod to Simpson. In the passage some girls and a few men were already hurrying forth. None of them took notice of Edwin and Hilda. They all plunged for the street as though the works had been on fire.

"They are in a hurry, my word!" Hilda murmured, with irony.

"And why shouldn't they be?" the employer protested almost angrily.

In the small yard stood the horseless cart, with "Edwin Clayhanger, Lithographer and Steam Printer, Bursley," on both its sides. The stable and cart-shed were in one pent-house, and to get to the stable it was necessary to pass through the cart-shed. Unchpin, a fat man of forty with a face marked by black seams, was bending over a chaff-cutter in

the cart-shed. He ignored the intruders. The stable consisted of one large loose-box, in which a grey animal was restlessly moving.

"You see!" Edwin muttered curtly.

"Oh! what a beautiful horse! I've never seen him before."

"Her," Edwin corrected.

"Is it a mare?"

"So they say."

"I never knew you'd got a fresh one."

"I haven't—yet. I've taken this one for a fortnight's trial, from Chawner. . . . How's she doing, Unchpin?" he called to the cart-shed.

Unchpin looked round and stared.

"Bit light," he growled and turned back to the chaff-cutter, which he seemed to be repairing.

"I thought so," said Edwin.

"But her's a good 'un," he added.

"But where's the old horse?" asked Hilda.

"With God," Edwin replied. "Dropped down dead last week."

"What of?"

Edwin shook his head.

"It's a privilege of horses to do that sort of thing," he said. "They're always doing it."

"You never told me."

"Well, you weren't here, for one thing."

The mare inquisitively but cautiously put her muzzle over the door of the box. Hilda stroked her. The animal's mysterious eyes, her beautiful coat, her broad back, her general bigness relatively to Hilda, the sound of her feet among the litter on the paving stones, the smell of the stable, —these things enchanted Hilda.

"I should adore horses!" she breathed, half to herself, ecstatically; and wondered whether she would ever be able to work her will on Edwin in the matter of a dog-cart. She pictured herself driving the grey mare, who had learnt to love her, in a flashing dog-cart, Edwin by her side on the front-seat. Her mind went back enviously to Tavy Mansion and Dartmoor. But she felt that Edwin had not enough



elasticity to comprehend the rapture of her dream. She foresaw nearly endless trouble and altercation and chicane before she could achieve her end. She was ready to despair, but she remembered her resolutions and took heart.

"I say, Unchpin," said Edwin. "I suppose this box couldn't be made into two stalls?"

Unchpin on his gaitered legs clumped towards the stable, and gazed gloomily into the box. When he had gazed for some time, he touched his cap to Hilda.

"It could," he announced.

"Could you get a trap into the shed as well as the cart?"

"Ay! If ye dropped th' shafts o' th' trap under th' cart. What of it, mester?"

"Nothing. Only missis is going to have this mare."

After a pause, Unchpin muttered:

"Missis, eh!"

Hilda had moved a little away into the yard. Edwin approached her, flushing slightly, and with a self-consciousness which he tried to dissipate with one wink. Hilda's face was set hard.

"I must just go back to the office," she said, in a queer voice.

She walked quickly, Edwin following. Simpson beheld their return with gentle surprise. In the private office Hilda shut the door. She then ran to the puzzled Edwin, and kissed him with the most startling vehemence, clasping her arms—in one hand she still held the muff—round his neck. She loved him for being exactly as he was. She preferred his strange, uncouth method of granting a request, of yielding, of flattering her caprice, to any politer, more conventional methods of the metropolis. She thought that no other man could be as deeply romantic as Edwin. She despised herself for ever having been misled by the surface of him. And even the surface of him she saw now as it were, through the prism of passionate affection, to be edged with the blending colours of the rainbow. And when they came again out of the office, after the sacred rite, and Edwin, as uplifted as she, glanced back nevertheless at the sheeted desk and the safe and the other objects in the room with the half-mechanical habitual solicitude of a man from whom the weight of respon-

sibility is never lifted, she felt saddened because she could not enter utterly into his impenetrable soul, and live through all his emotions, and comprehend like a creator the always baffling wistfulness of his eyes. This sadness was joy ; it was the aura of her tremendous satisfaction in his individuality and in her triumph and in the thought : " I alone stand between him and desolation."

## II

" Wo ! " exclaimed Hilda broadly, bringing the mare and the vehicle to a standstill in front of the ' Live and Let Live ' inn in the main street of the village of Stockbrook, which lay about a mile and a half off the high road from the Five Towns to Axe. And immediately the mare stopped she was enveloped in her own vapour.

" Ha ! " exclaimed Edwin, with faint benevolent irony. " And no bones broken ! "

A man came out from the stable-yard.

The village of Stockbrook gave the illusion that hundreds of English villages were giving that Christmas morning,—the illusion that its name was Arcadia, that finality had been reached, and that the forces of civilization could go no further. More suave than a Dutch village, incomparably neater and cleaner and more delicately finished than a French village, it presented, in the still, complacent atmosphere of long tradition, a picturesque medley of tiny architectures nearly every aspect of which was beautiful. And if seven people of different ages and sexes lived in a two-roomed cottage under a thatched roof hollowed by the weight of years, without drains and without water, and also without freedom, the beholder was yet bound to conclude that by some mysterious virtue their existence must be gracious, happy, and in fact ideal—especially on Christmas Day, though Christmas Day was also quarter-day—and that they would not on any account have it altered in the slightest degree. Who could believe that fathers of families drank away their children's bread in the quaint tap-room of that creeper-clad hostel—a public-house fit to produce ecstasy in the heart of every American traveller—' The Live and Let Live ' ? Who could have believed that the Wesleyan Methodists already singing a

Christmas hymn inside the dwarf Georgian conventicle, and their fellow-Christians straggling under the lych into the churchyard, scorned one another with an immortal detestation, each claiming a monopoly in knowledge of the unknowable? But, after all, the illusion of Arcadia was not entirely an illusion. In this calm, rime-decked, Christmas-imbued village, with its motionless trees enchanted beneath a vast grey impenetrable cloud, a sort of relative finality had indeed been reached,—the end of an epoch that was awaiting dissolution.

Edwin had not easily agreed to the project of shutting up house for the day and eating the Christmas dinner with Tertius Ingpen. Although customarily regarding the ritual of Christmas, with its family visits, its exchange of presents, its feverish kitchen activity, its somewhat insincere gaiety, its hours of boredom, and its stomachic regrets, as an ordeal rather than a delight, he nevertheless abandoned it with reluctance and a sense of being disloyal to something sacred. But the situation of Ingpen, Hilda's strong desire and her teasing promise of a surprise, and the still continuing dearth of servants had been good arguments to persuade him.

And though he had left Trafalgar Road moody and captious, thinking all the time of the deserted and cold home, he had arrived in Stockbrook tingling and happy, and proud of Hilda,—proud of her verve, her persistency, and her success. She had carried him very far on the wave of her new enthusiasm for horse-traction. She had beguiled him into immediately spending mighty sums on a dog-cart, new harness, rugs, a driving-apron, and a fancy whip. She had exhausted Unchpin, upset the routine of the lithographic business and gravely overworked the mare, in her determination to learn to drive. She had had the equipage out at night for her lessons. On the other hand, she had not in the least troubled herself about the purchase of a second horse for mercantile purposes, and a second horse had not yet been bought.

When she had announced that she would herself drive her husband and son over to Stockbrook, Edwin had absolutely negatived the idea; but Unchpin had been on her side; she had done the double journey with Unchpin, who judged her capable and the mare (eight years old) quite

reliable, and who moreover wanted Christmas as much as possible to himself. And Hilda had triumphed. Walking the mare uphill—and also downhill—she had achieved Stockbrook in safety ; and the conquering air with which she drew up at the 'Live and Let Live' was delicious. The chit's happiness and pride radiated out from her. It seemed to Edwin that by the mere strength of volition she had actually created the dog-cart and its appointments, and the mare too ! And he thought that he himself had not lived in vain if he could procure her such sensations as her glowing face then displayed. Her occasionally overbearing tenacity, and the little jars which good resolutions several weeks old had naturally not been powerful enough to prevent, were forgotten and forgiven. He would have given all his savings to please her caprice, and been glad. A horse and trap, or even a pair of horses and a landau, were a trifling price to pay for her girlish joy and for his own tranquillity in his beloved house and business.

"Catch me, both of you !" cried Hilda.

Edwin had got down, and walked round behind the vehicle to the footpath, where George stood grinning. The stableman, in classic attitude, was at the mare's head.

Hilda jumped rather wildly. It was Edwin who countered the shock of her descent. The edge of her velvet hat knocked against his forehead, disarranging his cap. He could smell the velvet, as for an instant he held his wife—strangely acquiescent and yielding—in his arms, and there was something intimately feminine in the faint odour. All Hilda's happiness seemed to pass into him, and that felicity sufficed for him. He did not desire any happiness personal to himself. He wanted only to live in her. His contentment was profound, complete, rapturous.

And yet in the same moment, reflecting that Hilda would certainly have neglected the well-being of the mare, he could say to the stableman :

"Put the rug over her, will you ?"

"Hello ! Here's Mr. Ingpen !" announced George, as he threw the coloured rug on the mare.

Ingpen, pale and thickly enveloped, came slowly round the bend of the road, waving and smiling. He had had a

relapse, after a too early sortie, and was recovering from it.

"I made sure you'd be about here," he said, shaking hands. "Merry Christmas, all!"

"Ought you to be out, my lad?" Edwin asked heartily.

"Out? Yes. I'm as fit as a fiddle. And I've been ordered mild exercise." He squared off gaily against George and hit the stout adolescent in the chest.

"What about all your parcels, Hilda?" Edwin inquired.

"Oh! We'll call for them afterwards."

"Afterwards?"

"Yes. Come along—before you catch a chill." She winked openly at Ingpen, who returned the wink. "Come along, dear. It's not far. We have to walk across the fields."

"Put her up, sir?" the stableman demanded of Edwin.

"Yes. And give her a bit of a rub down," he replied absently, remembering various references of Hilda's to a surprise. His heart misgave him. Ingpen and Hilda looked like plotters, very intimate and mischievous. He had a notion that living with a woman was comparable to living with a volcano—you never knew when a dangerous eruption might not occur.

Within three minutes the first and minor catastrophe had occurred.

"Bit sticky, this field-path of yours," said Edwin uneasily.

They were all four slithering about in brown clay under a ragged hedge in which a few red berries glowed.

"It was as hard as iron the day before yesterday," said Hilda.

"Oh! So you were here the day before yesterday, were you? . . . What's that house there?" Edwin turned to Ingpen.

"He's guessed it in one!" Ingpen murmured, and then went off into his characteristic *crescendo* laugh.

The upper part of a late eighteenth-century house, squat and square, with yellow walls, black uncurtained windows, high slim chimneys, and a blue slate roof, showed like a gigantic and mysterious fruit in a clump of variegated trees, some of which were evergreen.

"Ladderedge Hall, my boy," said Ingpen. "Seat of the Beechinors for about a hundred years."



" 'Seat,' eh ! " Edwin murmured sarcastically.

" It's been empty for two years," remarked Hilda brightly.  
" So we thought we'd have a look at it."

And Edwin said to himself that he had divined all along what the surprise was. It was astounding that a man could pass with such rapidity as Edwin from vivid joy to black and desolate gloom. She well knew that the idea of living in the country was extremely repugnant to him, and that nothing would ever induce him to consent to it. And yet she must needs lay this trap for him, prepare this infantile surprise, and thereby spoil his Christmas, she who a few moments earlier had been the embodiment of surrender in his arms ! He said no word. He hummed a few notes and glanced airily to right and left with an effort after unconcern. The presence of Ingpen and the boy, and the fact of Christmas, forbade him to speak freely. He could not suddenly stop and drive his stick into the earth and say savagely :

" Now listen to me ! Once for all, I won't have this country house idea ! So let it be understood,—if you want a row, you know how to get it."

The appearance of amity—and the more high-spirited the better—must be kept up throughout the day. Nevertheless in his heart he challenged Hilda desperately. All her good qualities became insignificant, all his benevolent estimates of her seemed ridiculous. She was the impossible woman. He saw a tremendous vista of unpleasantness, for her obstinacy in warfare was known to him, together with her perfect lack of scruple, of common sense, and of social decency. He had made her a present of a horse and trap—solely to please her—and this was his reward ! The more rope you gave these creatures, the more they wanted ! But he would give no more rope. Compromise was at an end. . . . The battle would be joined that night. . . . In his grim and resolute dejection there was something almost voluptuous. He continued to glance airily about, and at intervals to hum a few notes.

Over a stile they dropped into a rutty side-road, and opposite was the worn iron gate of Ladderedge Hall, with a house-agent's board on it. A short curved gravel drive, filmed with green, led to the front-door of the house. In front were

a lawn and a flower-garden, beyond a paddock, and behind a vegetable garden and a glimpse of stabling ; a compact property ! Ingpen drew a great key from his pocket. The plotters were all prepared ; they took their victim for a simpleton, a ninny, a lamb.

In the damp echoing interior Edwin gazed without seeing, and heard as in a dream without listening. This was the hall, this the dining-room, this the drawing-room, this the morning-room. . . . White marble mantelpieces, prehistoric grates, wall-paper hanging in strips, cobwebs, uneven floors, scaly ceilings, the invisible vapour of human memories ! This was the kitchen, enormous ; then the larder, enormous, and the scullery still more enormous (with a pump-handle flanking the slopstone) ! No water. No gas. And what was this room opening out of the kitchen ? Oh ! That must be the servants' hall. . . . Servants' hall indeed ! Imagine Edwin Clayhanger living in a ' Hall,' with a servants' hall therein ! Snobbishness unthinkable ! He would not be able to look his friends in the face. . . . On the first floor, endless bedrooms, but no bathroom. Here, though, was a small bedroom that would make a splendid bathroom. . . . Ingpen, the ever expert, conceived a tank-room in the roof, and traced routes for plumber's pipes. George, excited, and comprehending that he must conduct himself as behoved an architect, ran up to the attic floor to study on the spot the problem of the tank-room, and Ingpen followed. Edwin stared out of a window at the prospect of the Arcadian village lying a little below across the sloping fields.

" Come along, Edwin," Hilda coaxed.

Yes, she had pretended a deep concern for the welfare of the suffering, reckless bachelor, Tertius Ingpen. She had paid visit after visit in order to watch over his convalescence. Choosing to ignore his scorn for all her sex, she had grown more friendly with him than even Edwin had ever been. Indeed by her sympathetic attentions she had made Edwin seem callous in comparison. And all the time she had been merely pursuing a private design—with what girlish deceitfulness !

In the emptiness of the house the voices of Ingpen and George echoed from above down the second flight of stairs.

"No good going to the attics," muttered Edwin, on the landing.

Hilda, half cajoling, half fretful, protested:

"Now, Edwin, don't be disagreeable."

He followed her on high, martyriized. The front wall of the house rose nearly to the top of the attic windows, screening and darkening them.

"Cheerful view!" Edwin growled.

He heard Ingpen saying that the place could be had on a repairing lease for sixty-five pounds a year, and that perhaps one thousand two hundred pounds would buy it. Dirt cheap.

"Ah!" Edwin murmured. "I know those repairing leases. One thousand pounds wouldn't make this barn fit to live in."

He knew that Ingpen and Hilda exchanged glances.

"It's larger than Tavy Mansion," said Hilda.

Tavy Mansion! There was the secret! Tavy Mansion was at the bottom of her scheme. Alicia Hesketh had a fine house, and Hilda must have a finer. She, Hilda, of all people, was a snob. He had long suspected it.

He rejoined sharply:

"Of course it isn't larger than Tavy Mansion! It isn't as large."

"Oh, Edwin. How can you say such things!"

In the portico, as Ingpen was relocking the door, the husband said negligently, superiorly, cheerfully:

"It's not so bad. I expect there's hundreds of places like this up and down the country—going cheap."

The walk back to the 'Live and Let Live' was irked by constraint, against which every one fought nobly, smiling, laughing, making remarks about cockrobin, the sky, the Christmas dinner.

"So I hear it's settled you're going to London when you leave school, kiddie," said Tertius Ingpen, to bridge over a fearful hiatus in the prittle-prattle.

George, so big now and so mannishly dressed as to be amused and not a bit hurt by the appellation 'kiddie,' confirmed the statement in his deepening voice.

Edwin thought:

"It's more than *I* hear, anyway!"

Hilda had told him that during the visit to London the project for articling George to Johnnie Orgreave had been revived, but she had not said that a decision had been taken. Though Edwin from careful pride had not spoken freely—George being Hilda's affair and not his—he had shown no enthusiasm. Johnnie Orgreave had sunk permanently in his esteem—scarcely less so than Jimmie, whose conjugal eccentricities had scandalized the Five Towns and were achieving the ruin of the Orgreave practice; or than Tom, who was developing into a miser. Moreover, he did not at all care for George going to London. Why should it be thought necessary for George to go to London? The sagacious and successful provincial in Edwin was darkly jealous of London, as a rival superficial and brilliant. And now he learnt from Ingpen that George's destiny was fixed. . . . A matter of small importance, however!

Did 'they' seriously expect him to travel from Ladderedge Hall to his works, and from his works to Ladderedge Hall every weekday of his life? He laughed sardonically to himself.

Out came the sun, which George greeted with a cheer. And Edwin, to his own surprise, began to feel hungry.

### III

"I shan't take that house, you know," said Edwin, casually and yet confidentially, in a pause which followed a long analysis, by Ingpen, of Ingpen's sensations in hospital before he was out of danger.

They sat on opposite sides of a splendid extravagant fire in Ingpen's dining-room.

Ingpen, sprawling in a shabby, uncomfortable easy chair, and flushed with the activity of digestion, raised his eyebrows, squinted down at the cigarette between his lips, and answered impartially:

"No. So I gather. Of course you must understand it was Hilda's plan to go up there. I merely fell in with it,—simplest thing to do in these cases!"

"Certainly."

Thus they both condescended to the feather-headed capri-

cious woman, dismissed her, and felt a marked access of sincere intimacy on a plane of civilization exclusively masculine.

In the succeeding silence of satisfaction and relief could be heard George, in the drawing-room above, practising again the piano part of a Haydn violin sonata which he had very nervously tried over with Ingpen while they were awaiting dinner.

Ingpen said suddenly :

"I say, old chap ! Why have you never mentioned that you happened to meet a certain person in my room at Hanbridge that night you went over there for me ?" He frowned.

Edwin had a thrill, pleasurable and apprehensive, at the prospect of a supreme confidence.

"It was no earthly business of mine," he answered lightly. But his tone conveyed : "You surely ought to be aware that my loyalty and my discretion are complete."

And Ingpen, replying to Edwin's tone, said with a simple directness that flattered Edwin to the heart :

"Naturally I knew I was quite safe in your hands. . . . I've reassured the lady." Ingpen smiled slightly.

Edwin was too proud to tell Ingpen that he had not said a word to Hilda, and Ingpen was too proud to tell Edwin that he assumed as much.

At that moment Hilda came into the room, murmuring a carol that some children of Stockbrook had sung on the doorstep during dinner.

"Don't be afraid—I'm not going to interrupt. I know you're in the thick of it," said she archly, not guessing how exactly truthful she was.

Ingpen, keeping his presence of mind in the most admirable manner, rejoined with irony :

"You don't mean to say you've finished already explaining to Mrs. Dummer how she ought to run my house for me ?"

"How soon do you mean to have this table cleared ?" said Hilda.

The Christmas dinner, served by a raw girl in a large bluish-white pinafore, temporarily hired to assist Mrs. Dummer the housekeeper, had been a good one. Its only real fault



was that it had had a little too much the air of being a special and mighty effort ; and although it owed something to Hilda's parcels, Ingpen was justified in the self-satisfaction which he did not quite conceal as a bachelor host. But now, under Hilda's quizzing gaze, not merely the table but the room and the house sank to the tenth-rate. The coarse imperfections of the linen and the cutlery grew very apparent ; the disorder of bottles and glasses and cups recalled the refectory of an inferior club. And the untidiness of the room, heaped with accumulations of newspapers, magazines, documents, books, boxes and musical-instrument cases, loudly accused the solitary despot whose daily caprices of arrangement were perpetuated and rendered sacred by the ukase that nothing was to be disturbed. Hilda's glinting eyes seemed to challenge each corner and dark place to confess its shameful dirt, and the malicious poise of her head mysteriously communicated the fact that in the past fortnight she had spied out every sinister secret in the whole graceless, primitive wigwam.

"This table," retorted Ingpen bravely, "is going to be cleared when it won't disturb me to have it cleared."

"All right," said Hilda. "But Mrs. Dummer does want to get on with her washing-up."

"Look here, madam," Ingpen replied. "You're a little ray of sunshine, and all that, and I'm the first to say so ; but I'm not your husband." He made a warning gesture. "Now don't say you'd be sorry for any woman I was the husband of. Think of something more original." He burst out laughing.

Hilda went to the window and looked out at the fading day.

"Please, I only popped in to say it's nearly a quarter to three, and George and I will go down to the inn and bring the dog-cart up here. I want a little walk. We shan't get home till dark as it is."

"Oh ! Chance it and stop for tea, and all will be forgiven."

"Drive home in the dark ? Not much !" Edwin murmured.

"He's afraid of my driving," said Hilda.

When Edwin and Ingpen were alone together once more,

Ingpen's expression changed back instantly to that which Hilda had disturbed, and Edwin's impatience, which had uneasily simmered during the interruption, began to boil.

"Her husband's in a lunatic asylum, I may tell you," said Ingpen.

"Whose?"

"The young woman's in question."

For Edwin, it was as if a door had opened in a wall and disclosed a vast unsuspected garden of romance.

"Really!"

"Yes, my boy," Ingpen went on quietly, with restraint, but not without a naïve and healthy pride in the sudden display of the marvellous garden. "And I didn't meet her at a concert, or on the Grand Canal, or anything of that sort. I met her in a mill at Oldham while I was doing my job. He was the boss of the mill. I walked into an office and he was lying on the floor on the flat of his back, and she was wiping her feet on his chest. He was saying in a very anxious tone: 'You aren't half wiping them. Harder! Harder!' That was his little weakness, you see. He happened to be convinced that he was a doormat. She had been hiding the thing for weeks, coming with him to the works, and so on, to calm him." Ingpen spoke more quickly and excitedly: "I never saw a more awful thing in my life! I never saw a more awful thing in my life! And coming across it suddenly, you see. . . . There was something absolutely odious in him lying down like that, and her trying to soothe him in the way he wanted. You should have seen the serious expression of his face, simply bursting with anxiety for her to wipe her boots properly on him. And her face when she caught sight of me. Oh! Dreadful! Dreadful!" Ingpen paused, and then continued calmly: "Of course I soon tumbled to it. For the matter of that, it didn't want much tumbling to. He went raving mad the same afternoon. And he's been more or less raving mad ever since."

"What a ghastly business. . . . Any children?"

"No, thank God!" Ingpen answered with fresh emotion. "But don't you forget that she's still the wife of that lunatic, and he'll probably live for ever. She's tied up to him just as if she was tied up to a post. Those are our divorce laws!"

Isn't it appalling? Isn't it inconceivable? Just think of the situation of that woman!" Ingpen positively glared at Edwin in the intensity of his indignation.

"Awful!" Edwin murmured.

"Quite alone in the world, you know!" said Ingpen. "I'm hanged if I know what she'd have done without me. She hadn't a friend—at any rate she hadn't a friend with a grain of sense. Astonishing how solitary some couples are! . . . It aged her frightfully. She's much younger than she 'looks. Happily there was a bit of money—enough in fact."

Deeply as Edwin had been impressed by his romantic discovery of a woman in Ingpen's room at Hanbridge, he was still more impressed by it now. He saw the whole scene again, and saw it far more poetically. He accused himself of blindness, and also of a certain harshness of attitude towards the woman. He endowed her now with wondrous qualities. The adventure, in its tragicalness and its clandestine tenderness, was enchanting. How exquisite must be the relations between Ingpen and the woman if without warning she could go to his lair at night and wait confidently for his return! How divine the surprise for him, how ardent the welcome! He envied Ingpen. And also he admired him, for Ingpen had obviously conducted the affair with worthy expertize. And he had known how to win devotion.

With an air of impartiality Ingpen proceeded:

"You wouldn't see her quite at her best, I'm afraid. She's very shy—and naturally she'd be more shy than ever when you saw her. She's quite a different woman when the shyness has worn off. The first two or three times I met her I must say I didn't think she was anything more than a nice well-meaning creature—you know what I mean. But she's much more than that. Can't play, but I believe she has a real feeling for music. She has time for reading, and she does read. And she has a more masculine understanding than nearly any other woman I've ever come across."

"You wait a bit!" thought Edwin. This simplicity on the part of a notable man of the world pleased him and gave him a comfortable sense of superiority.

Aloud he responded sympathetically:

"Good! . . . Do I understand she's living in the Five Towns now?"

"Yes," said Ingpen, after a hesitation. He spoke in a peculiar, significant voice, carefully modest. The single monosyllable conveyed to Edwin: "I cannot deny it. I was necessary to this woman, and in the end she followed me!"

Edwin was impressed anew by the full revelation of romance which had concealed itself in the squalid dailiness of the Five Towns.

"In fact," said Ingpen. "You never know your luck. If she'd been free I might have been fool enough to get married."

"Why do you say a thing like that?"

"Because I think I should be a fool to marry." Ingpen, tapping his front teeth with his *finger-nail*, spoke reflectively, persuasively, and with calm detachment.

"Why?" asked Edwin, persuasively also, but nervously, as though the spirit of adventure in the search for truth was pushing him to fatal dangers.

"Marriage isn't worth the price—for me, that is. I dare say I'm peculiar." Ingpen said this quite seriously, prepared to consider impartially the proposition that he was peculiar. "The fact is, my boy, I think my freedom is worth a bit more than I could get out of any marriage."

"That's all very well," said Edwin, trying to speak with the same dispassionate conviction as Ingpen, and scarcely succeeding. "But look what you miss! Look how you live!" Almost involuntarily he glanced with self-complacence round the unlovely, unseemly room, and his glance seemed to penetrate ceilings and walls, and to discover and condemn the whole charmless house from top to bottom.

"Why? What's the matter with it?" Ingpen replied uneasily; a slight flush came into his cheeks. "Nobody has a more comfortable bed or more comfortable boots than I have. How many women can make coffee as good as mine? No woman ever born can make first-class tea. I have all I want."

"No, you don't. And what's the good of talking about coffee, and tea, and beds?"

"Well, what else is there I want that I haven't got? If you mean fancy cushions and draperies, no thanks!"

"You know what I mean all right. . . . And then 'freedom' as you say. What do you mean by freedom?"

"I don't specially mean," said Ingpen, tranquil and benevolent, "what I may call physical freedom. I'd give that up. I like a certain amount of untidiness, for instance, and I don't think an absence of dust is the greatest thing in the world; but I wouldn't in the least mind giving all that up. It wouldn't really matter to me. What I won't give up is my intellectual freedom. Perhaps I mean intellectual honesty. I'd give up even my intellectual freedom if I could be deprived of it fairly and honestly. But I shouldn't be. There's almost no intellectual honesty in marriage. There can't be. The entire affair is a series of compromises, chiefly base on the part of the man. The alternative is absolute subjection of the woman, which is offensive. No woman not absolutely a slave ever hears the truth except in anger. You can't say the same about men, and you know it. I'm not blaming; I'm stating. Even assuming a married man gets a few advantages that I miss, they're all purely physical——"

"Oh, no! Not at all."

"My boy," Ingpen insisted, sitting up, and gazing earnestly at Edwin. "Analyse them down, and they're all physical—all! And I tell you I won't pay the price for them. I won't. I've no grievance against women; I can enjoy being with women as much as anybody, but I won't—I will not—live permanently on their level. That's why I say I might have been fool enough to get married. It's quite simple."

"Hm!"

Edwin, although indubitably one of those who had committed the vast folly of marriage, and therefore subject to Ingpen's indictment, felt not the least constraint, nor any need to offer an individual defence. Ingpen's demeanour seemed to have lifted the argument above the personal. His assumption that Edwin could not be offended was positively inspiring to Edwin. The fear of truth was exorcized. Freedom of thought existed in that room in England. Edwin reflected: "If he's right and I'm condemned accordingly,—



well, I can't help it. Facts are facts, and they're extremely interesting."

He also reflected :

"Why on earth can't Hilda and I discuss like that?"

He did not know why, but he profoundly and sadly knew that such discussion would be quite impossible with Hilda.

The red-hot coals in the grate subsided together.

"And I'll tell you another thing——" Ingpen commenced.

He was stopped by the entrance of Mrs. Dummer, a fat woman, with an old japanned tray. Mrs. Dummer came in like a desperate forlorn hope. Her aged, grim, and yet somewhat hysterical face seemed to say : "I'm going to clear this table and get on with my work, even if I die for it at the hands of a brutal tyrant." Her gestures as she made a space for the tray and set it down on the table were the formidable gestures of the persecuted at bay.

"Mrs. Dummer," said Ingpen, in a weak voice, leaning back in his chair. "Would you mind fetching me my tonic off my dressing-table? I've forgotten it."

"Bless us!" exclaimed Mrs. Dummer.

As she had hurried out, Ingpen winked placidly at Edwin in the room in which the shadows were already falling.

Nevertheless, when the dog-cart arrived at the front-door Ingpen did seem to show some signs of exhaustion. Hilda would not get down. She sent word into the house by George that the departure must occur at once. Ingpen went out with Edwin, plaintively teased Hilda about the insufferable pride of those who sit in driving-seats, and took leave of her with the most punctilious and chivalrous ceremonial, while Hilda inscrutably smiling bent down to him with condescension from her perch.

"I'll sit behind going home, I think," said Edwin. "George, you can sit with your mother."

"Tchik! Tchik!" Hilda signalled.

The mare with a jerk started off down the misty and darkening road.

## IV

The second and major catastrophe occurred very soon after the arrival in Trafalgar Road. It was three-quarters of an hour after sunset and the street-lamps were lighted. Unchpin, with gloomy fatalism, shivered obscurely in the dark porch, waiting to drive the dog-cart down to the stable. Hilda had requested his presence ; it was she also who had got him to bring the equipage up to the house in the morning. She had implied, but not asserted, that to harness the mare and trot up to Bleakridge was the work of a few minutes, and that a few minutes' light labour could make no real difference to Unchpin's Christmas Day. Edwin, descrying Unchpin in the porch, saw merely a defenceless man who had been robbed of the most sacred holiday of the year in order to gratify the selfish caprice of an overbearing woman. When asked how long he had been in the porch, Unchpin firmly answered that he had been there since three o'clock, the hour appointed by Mrs. Clayhanger. Edwin knew nothing of this appointment, and in it he saw more evidence of Hilda's thoughtless egotism. He perceived that he would be compelled to stop her from using his employees as her private servants, and that the prohibition would probably cause trouble. Hilda demanded curtly of Unchpin why he had not waited in the warm kitchen, according to instructions, instead of catching his death of cold in the porch. The reply was that he had rung and knocked fifteen times without getting a response.

At this Hilda became angry, not only with Emmie, the defaulting servant, but with the entire servant class and with the world. Emmie, the new cook, and temporarily the sole resident servant, was to have gone to Maggie's for her Christmas dinner, and to have returned at half-past two without fail in order to light the drawing-room fire and prepare for tea-making. But, Maggie at the last moment having decided to go to Clara's for the middle of the day, Emmie was told to go with her and be as useful as she could at Mrs. Benbow's until a quarter-past two.

"I hope you've got your latchkey, Edwin," said Hilda threateningly, as if ready to assume that with characteristic and inexcusable negligence he had left his latchkey at home.

"I have," he said dryly, drawing the key from his pocket.

"Oh!" she muttered, as if saying: "Well, after all, you're no better than you ought to be." And took the key.

When she opened the door, Edwin surreptitiously gave half-a-crown to Unchpin, who was lighting the carriage-lamps.

George, with the marvellous self-preserving instinct of a small animal unprotected against irritated prowling monsters, had become invisible.

The front-doorway yawned black like the portal of a tomb. The place was a terrible negation of Christmas. Edwin felt for the radiator; it was as cold to the touch as a dead hand. He lit the hall-lamp, and the decorations of holly and mistle-toe contrived by Hilda and George with smiles and laughter on Christmas Eve stood revealed as the very symbol of insincerity. Without taking off his hat and coat, he went into the unlighted glacial drawing-room, where Hilda was kneeling at the grate and striking matches. A fragment of newspaper blazed, and then the flame expired. The fire was badly laid.

"I'm sick of servants!" Hilda exclaimed with fury. "Sick! They're all alike!" Her tone furiously blamed Edwin and everybody.

And Edwin knew that the day was a pyramid of which this moment was the dreadful apex. At intervals during the drive home Hilda had talked confidentially to George of the wondrous things he and she could do if they only resided in the country—things connected with flowers, vegetables, cocks, hens, ducks, cows, rabbits, horses. She had sketched out the life of a mistress of Ladderedge Hall, and she had sketched it out for the benefit of the dull, hard man sitting behind. Her voice, so persuasive and caressing to George, had been charged with all sorts of accusations against the silent fellow whose back now and then collided with hers. She had exasperated him. She had wilfully and deliberately exasperated him. . . . Her treatment of Unchpin, her childish outburst concerning servants, her acutely disagreeable demeanour, all combined now to exhaust the poor remainder of Edwin's patience. Not one word had been said about Ladderedge Hall, but Ladderedge Hall loomed always between

them. Deadly war was imminent. Let it come! He would prefer war to a peace which meant for him nothing but insults and injustice. He would welcome war. He turned brusquely and lit the chandelier. On the table beneath it lay the writing-case that Hilda had given to George, and the edition of Matthew Arnold that she had given to Edwin, for a Christmas present. One of Edwin's Christmas presents to her, an ermine stole, she was wearing round her neck. Tragic absurdities, these false tokens of love. . . . There they were, both of them in full street attire, she kneeling at the grate and he standing at the table, in the dank drawing-room which now had no resemblance to a home.

Edwin said with frigid and disdainful malevolence :

"I wish you could control yourself, Hilda. The fact that a servant's a bit late on Christmas Day is no reason for you to behave like a spoilt child. You're offensive."

His words, righteously and almost murderously resentful, seemed to startle and frighten the very furniture, which had the air of waiting, enchanted, for disaster.

Hilda turned her head and glared at Edwin. She threw back her shoulders, and her thick eyebrows seemed to meet in a passionate frown.

"Yes," she said, with her clear, stinging articulation. "That's just like you, that is! I lend my servant to your sister. She doesn't send her back,—and it's my fault! I should have thought the Benbows twisted you round their little finger enough, without you having to insult me because of them. Goodness knows what tricks they didn't play to get your aunt's money—every penny of it! And now they make you do all the work of the estate, for their benefit, and of course you do it like a lamb! You can never spare a minute from the works for me, but you can spare hours and hours for Auntie Hamps's estate and the Benbows! It's always like that." She paused and spoke more thickly: "But I don't see why you should insult me on the top of it!"

Her features went awry. She sobbed.

"You make me ill!" said Edwin savagely.

He walked out of the room and pulled the door to.

George was descending the stairs.

"Where are you going to, uncle?" demanded George, as Edwin opened the front-door.

"I'm going down to see Auntie Maggie," Edwin answered, forcing himself to speak very gently. "Tell your mother if she asks." The boy guessed the situation. It was humiliating that he should guess it, and still more humiliating to be compelled to make use of him in the fatal affair.

## V

He walked at a moderate pace down Trafalgar Road. He did not know where he was going. Certainly he was not going to see Maggie. He had invented the visit to Maggie instantly in answer to George's question, and he could not understand why he had invented it. Maggie would be at Clara's; and, in a misfortune, he would never go to Clara's; only when he was successful and triumphant could he expose himself to the Benbows.

The weather was damp and chill without rain. The chilliness was rather tonic and agreeable to his body, and he felt quite warm, though on getting down from the dog-cart a few minutes earlier he had been cold almost to the point of numbness. He could not remember how, nor when, the change had occurred.

Every street-lamp was the centre of a greenish-grey sphere, which presaged rain as though the street-lamp were the moon. The pavements were greasy with black slime, the road deep in lamp-reflecting mire through which the tram-lines ran straight and gleaming. Far down the slope a cage of light moving obscurely between the glittering avenue of lamps indicated the steam-tram as it lifted towards the farther hill into the heart of the town. Where the lamps merged together and vanished, but a little to the left, the illuminated dial of the clock in the Town Hall tower glowed in the dark heavens. The street was deserted; no "Signal" boys, no ragged girls staring into sweet shops, no artisans returning from work, no rattling carts, no vehicles of any kind save the distant tram. All the little shops were shut; even the little green-grocer's shop, which never closed, was shut now, and its customary winter smell of oranges and apples withdrawn. The little inns, not yet open, showed through their lettered



plate windows one watching jet of gas amid blue-and-red paper festoons and bunches of holly. The gloomy fronts of nearly all the houses were pierced with oblongs of light on which sometimes appeared transient shadows of human beings. A very few other human beings, equally mysterious, passed furtive and baffling up and down the slope. Melancholy, familiar, inexplicable, and piteous—the melancholy of existence itself—rose like a vapour out of the sodden ground, ennobling all the scene. The lofty disc of the Town Hall clock solitary in the sky was somehow so heart-rending, and the lives of the people both within and without the houses seemed to be so woven of futility and sorrow, that the menace of eternity grew intolerable.

Edwin's brain throbbed and shook like an engine-house in which the machinery was his violent thoughts. He no longer saw his marriage as a chain of disconnected episodes ; he saw it as a drama the true meaning of which was at last revealed by the climax now upon him. He had had many misgivings about it, and had put them away, and they all swept back presenting themselves as a series of signs that pointed to inevitable disaster. He had been blind, from wilfulness or cowardice. He now had vision. He had arrived at honesty. He said to himself, as millions of men and women have said to themselves, with awestruck calm : " My marriage was a mistake." And he began to face the consequences of the admission. He was not such a fool as to attach too much importance to the immediate quarrel, nor even to the half-suppressed but supreme dissension concerning a place of residence. He assumed, even, that the present difficulties would somehow, with more or less satisfaction, be adjusted. What, however, would not and could not be adjusted was the temperament that produced them. Those difficulties, which had been preceded by smaller difficulties, would be followed by greater. It was inevitable. To hope otherwise would be weakly sentimental, as his optimism during the vigil in Auntie Hamps's bedroom had been weakly sentimental. He must face the truth : " She won't alter her ways—and I shan't stand them." No matter what their relations might in future superficially appear to be, their union was over. Or, if it was not actually over, it soon would

be over, for the forces to shatter it were uncontrollable and increasing in strength.

"Of course she can't help being herself!" he said impartially. "But what's that got to do with me?"

His indictment of his wife was terrific and not to be answered. She had always been a queer girl. On the first night he ever saw her, she had run after him into his father's garden, and stood with him in the garden-porch that he had since done away with, and spoken to him in the strangest manner. She was abnormal. The dismal and perilous adventure with George Cannon could not have happened to a normal woman. She could not see reason, and her sense of justice was non-existent. If she wanted a thing she must have it. In reality she was a fierce and unscrupulous egotist, incapable of understanding a point of view other than her own. Imagine her bursting out like that about Auntie Hamps's will! It showed how her mind ran. That Auntie Hamps had an absolute right to dispose of her goods as she pleased; that there was a great deal to be said for Auntie Hamps's arrangements; that in any case the Benbows were not to blame; that jealousy was despicable and the mark of a mean mind; that the only dignified course for himself was to execute the trust imposed upon him without complaining,—these things were obvious; but not to her! No human skill could ever induce her to grant them. She did not argue—she felt; and the disaster was that she did not feel rightly. . . . Imagine her trying to influence Ingpen's housekeeping, to worry the man,—she the guest and he the host! What would she say if anybody played the same game on her? . . .

She could not be moderate. She expected every consideration from others, but she would yield none. She had desired a horse and trap. She had received it. And how had she used the gift? She had used it in defiance of the needs of the works. She had upset everybody and everything, and assuredly Unchpin had a very legitimate grievance. . . . She had said that she could not feel at home in her own house while the house belonged to Maggie. Edwin had obediently bought the house,—and now she wanted another house. She scorned her husband's convenience and prefer-

ences, and she wanted a house that was preposterously inaccessible. The satisfaction of her caprice for a dog-cart had not in the slightest degree appeased her egotism. On the contrary it had further excited her egotism and sharpened its aggressiveness. And by what strange infantile paths had she gone about the enterprise of shifting Edwin into the country! Not a frank word to Edwin of the house she had found and decided upon! Silly rumours of a 'surprise!' And she had counted upon the presence of Ingpen to disarm Edwin and to tie his hands. The conspiracy was simply childish. And because Edwin had at once shown his distaste for her scheme, she had taken offence. Her acrimony had gradually increased throughout the day, hiding for a time under malicious silences and enigmatic demeanours, darting out in remarks to third persons and drawing back, and at last displaying itself openly, cruelly, monstrosly. The injustice of it all passed belief. There was no excuse for Hilda, and there never would be any excuse for her. She was impossible; she would be still more impossible. He did not make her responsible; he admitted that she was not responsible. But at the same time, with a disdainful and cold resentment, he condemned and hated her.

He recalled Ingpen's: "I won't pay the price."

"And I won't!" he said. "The end has come!"

He envied Ingpen.

And there flitted through his mind the dream of liberty—not the liberty of ignorant youth, but liberty with experience and knowledge to use it. Ravishing prospect! Marriage had advantages. But he could retain those advantages in freedom. He knew what a home ought to be; he had the instinct of the interior; he considered that he could keep house as well as any woman, and better than most; he was not, in that respect, at all like Ingpen, who suffered from his inability to produce and maintain comfort. . . . He remembered Ingpen's historic habitual phrase about the proper place for women,—'behind the veil.' It was a phrase which intensely annoyed women; but nevertheless how true! And Ingpen had put it into practice. Ingpen, even in the banal Five Towns, had shown the way. . . . He saw the existence of males, with its rationality and its

dependableness, its simplicity, its directness, its honesty, as something ideal. And as he pictured such an existence—with or without the romance of mysterious and interesting creatures ever modestly waiting for attention behind the veil—further souvenirs of Hilda's wilful naughtiness and injustice rushed into his mind by thousands; in formulating to himself his indictment against her, he had overlooked ninety per cent. of them; they were endless, innumerable. He marshalled them again and again, with the fiercest virulence, the most sombre gloom, with sardonic, bitter pleasure.

In the hollow where Trafalgar Road begins to be known as Duck Bank, he turned to the left and, crossing the foot of Woodisun Bank, arrived at one of the oldest quarters of the town, where St. Luke's Church stands in its churchyard amid a triangle of little ancient houses. By the light of a new and improved gas-lamp at the churchyard gates could be seen the dark silhouette of the Norman tower and the occasional white gleam of gravestones.

One solitary couple, arm-in-arm, and bending slightly towards each other, came sauntering in the mud past the historic National Schools towards the illumination of the lamp. The man was a volunteer, with a brilliant vermilion tunic, white belt, and black trousers; he wore his hat jauntily and carried a diminutive cane; pride was his warm overcoat. The girl was stout and short, with a heavily flowered hat and a dark amorphous cloak; under her left arm she carried a parcel. They were absorbed in themselves. Edwin discerned first the man's face, in which was a gentle and harmless coxcombry, and then the girl's face, ecstatic, upward-gazing, seeing absolutely naught but the youth. . . . It was Emmie's face, as Edwin perceived after a momentary doubt due to his unfamiliarity with the inhabitants of his own house. Emmie, so impatiently and angrily awaited by her mistress, had lost her head about a uniform. Emmie, whose place was in the kitchen among saucepans and crockery, dish-clouts and brushes, had escaped into another realm, where time is not. That she had no immediate intention of returning to her kitchen was shown by the fact that she was moving deliberately in a direction away from it. She was not pretty, for Hilda had perforce long since ceased to insist upon physical

charm in her servants ; she was not even young,—she was probably older than the adored soldier. But her rapt ecstasy, her fearful bliss, made a marvellous sight, rendered touching by the girl's coarse gawkiness.

It seemed lamentable, pathetic, to Edwin that destiny should not permit her to remain for ever in that dream. "Can it be possible," he thought, "that a creature capable of such surpassing emotion is compelled to cook my bacon and black my boots?"

The couple, wordless, strolled onwards, sticking close to the railings. The churchyard was locked, but Emmie and the soldier were doing the best they could to satisfy that instinct which in the Five Towns seems to drive lovers to graves for their pleasure. The little houses cast here and there a blind yellow eye on the silent and tranquil scene. Edwin turned abruptly back into Woodisun Bank, feeling that he was a disturber of the peace.

Suddenly deciding to walk up to Hillport 'for the sake of exercise,' he quickened his pace. After a mile and a half when he had crossed the railway at Shawport and was on the Hillport rise, and the Five Towns had begun to spread out in a map behind him, he noticed that he was perspiring. He very seldom perspired, and therefore he had the conviction that the walk was 'doing him good.' He felt exhilarated and moved still faster.

His mood was now changed. The spectacle of Emmie and the soldier had thrown him violently out of resentment into wonder. His indignation was somewhat exhausted, and though he tried again and again to flick it back into full heat and activity, he could not. He kept thinking of the moment in the morning when, standing ready to jump from the dog-cart, his wife had said: "Catch me, both of you," and he recalled vividly the sensation of her acquiescence, her momentary yielding—imperceptible yet unforgettable—as he supported her strongly in his arms; and with this memory was mingled the smell of velvet. Strange that a woman so harsh, selfish and overbearing, could thus contradict her whole character in an instant of surrender! Was she in that gesture confiding to him the deepest secret? . . . Rubbish! But now he no longer looked down on her disdain-



fully. Honesty made him admit that it was puerile to affect disdain of an individuality so powerful and so mysterious. If she was a foe, she was at any rate a dangerous fighter, and not to be played with. And yet she could be a trifle, a wisp of fragile flesh in his arms!

He saw the beatific face of Emmie against the church-yard gates under the lamp. . . . Why not humour Hilda? Why not let her plant their home according to her caprice? . . . Certainly not! Never would he do it! Why should he? Time after time he angrily rejected the idea. Time after time it returned. What did it matter to Hilda where she lived? And had he not bought their present house solely in order to please her? The first consideration in choosing a home ought to be and must be the consideration of business convenience. . . . Yet, what did it matter to him where his home was? (He remembered a phrase of Ingpen's: "I don't live on that plane.") Could he not adapt himself? He dreamt of very rapid transit between Ladderedge Hall and the works. Motor-cars had just become lawful; but he had never happened to see one, though he had heard of several in the district, or passing through. His imagination could not rise so high as a motor-car. That he could ever use or possess one did not even occur to him. He thought only of a fast-trotting horse, and a trap with india-rubber tyres; himself the driver; sometimes Hilda the driver . . . an equipage to earn renown in the district. "Clayhanger's trap,"—"He drives in from Ladderedge in thirty-five minutes. The horse simply won't walk; doesn't know how to!" And so on. He had heard such talk of others. Why should not others hear it of him? . . . Then, the pleasure, the mere pleasure—call it sensual or what you like—of granting a caprice to the capricious creature! If a thing afforded her joy, why not give it? . . . To see her in the rôle of mistress of a country-house, delicately horsey, excited about charitable schemes, protecting the poor, working her will upon gardeners and grooms, stamping her foot in the violence of her resolution to have her own way, offering sugar to a horse, nursing a sick dog! Amusing! Agreeable! . . . And all that activity of hers a mere dependence of his own! Flattering to his pride! . . . He could afford it easily, for he was richer

even than his wife supposed. To let the present house ought not to be difficult. To sell it advantageously ought not to be impossible. . . . In this connection he thought, though not seriously, of Tom Swetnam, who had at last got himself engaged to one of those Scandinavian women about whom he had been chaffed for years. Tom would be wanting an abode, and probably a good one.

He was carried away by his own dream. To realize that dream he had only to yield, to nod negligently, to murmur with benevolent tolerance : " All right. Do as you please." He would have nothing to withdraw, for he had uttered no refusal. Not a word had passed between them as to Ladder-edge Hall since they had quitted it. He had merely said that he did not like it,—' poured cold water on it ' as the phrase was. True, his demeanour had plainly intimated that he was still opposed in principle to the entire project of living in the country ; but a demeanour need not be formally retracted ; it could be negatived without any humiliation. . . .

No, he would never yield, though yielding seemed to open up a pleasant, a delicious prospect. He could not yield. It would be wrong, and it would be dangerous, to yield. Had he not already quite clearly argued out with himself the whole position ? And yet why not yield ? . . . He was afraid as before a temptation.

He re-crossed the railway, and crossed Fowlea Brook, a boundary, back into the borough. The dark path lay parallel with the canal, but below it. He had gone right through Hillport and round Hillport Marsh and returned down the flank of the great ridge that protects the Five Towns on the west. He could not recollect the details of the walk ; he only knew that he had done it all, that time and the miles had passed with miraculous rapidity, and that his boots were very muddy. A change in the consistency of the mud caused him to look up at the sky, which was clearing and showed patches of faint stars. A frost had set in, despite the rainy prophecy of street-lamps. In a few moments he had climbed the short steep curving slope on to the canal-bridge. He was breathless and very hot.

He stopped and sat on the parapet. In his schooldays

he had crossed this bridge twice a day on the journey to and from Oldcastle. Many times he had lingered on it. But he had forgotten the little episodes of his schooldays, which seemed now almost to belong to another incarnation. He did, however, recall that as a boy he could not sit on the parapet unless he vaulted up to it. He thought he must have been ridiculously small and boyish. The lights of Bursley, Bleakridge, Hanbridge and Cauldon hung round the eastern horizon in an arc. To the north presided the clock of Bursley Town Hall, and to the south the clock of Cauldon Church ; but both were much too far off to be deciphered. Below and around the church clock the vague fires of Cauldon Bar Iron-works played, and the tremendous respiration of the blast-furnaces filled the evening. Beneath him gleamed the foul water of the canal. . . . He trembled with the fever that precedes a supreme decision. He trembled as though he was about to decide whether or not he would throw himself into the canal. Should he accept the country-house scheme ? Ought he to accept it ? The question was not simply that of a place of residence,—it concerned all his life.

He admitted that marriage must be a mutual accommodation. He was, and always had been, ready to accommodate. But Hilda was unjust, monstrously unjust. Of that he was definitely convinced. . . . Well, perhaps not monstrously unjust, but very unjust. How could he excuse such injustice as hers ? He obviously could not excuse it. . . . On previous occasions he had invented excuses for her conduct, but they were not convincing excuses. They were compromises between his intellectual honesty and his desire for peace. They were, at bottom, sentimentalism.

And then there flashed into his mind, complete, the great discovery of all his career. It was banal ; it was commonplace ; it was what every one knew. Yet it was the great discovery of all his career. If Hilda had not been unjust in the assertion of her own individuality, there could be no merit in yielding to her. To yield to a just claim was not meritorious, though to withstand it would be wicked. He was objecting to injustice as a child objects to rain on a holiday. Injustice was a tremendous actuality ! It had to be faced and accepted. (He himself was unjust. At any rate

he intellectually conceived that he must be unjust, though honestly he could remember no instance of injustice on his part.) To reconcile oneself to injustice was the master achievement. He had read it; he had been aware of it; but he had never really felt it till that moment on the dark canal-bridge. He was awed, thrilled by the realization. He longed ardently to put it to the test. He did put it to the test. He yielded on the canal-bridge. And in yielding, it seemed to him that he was victorious.

He thought confidently and joyously:

"I'm not going to be beaten by Hilda! And I'm not going to be beaten by marriage. Dashed if I am! A nice thing if I had to admit that I wasn't clever enough to be a husband!"

He was happy, but somewhat timorously so. He had the sense to suspect that his discovery would scarcely transform marriage into an everlasting Eden, and that serious trouble would not improbably recur. "Marriage keeps on all the time till you're dead!" he said to himself. But he profoundly knew that he had advanced a stage, that he had acquired new wisdom and new power, and that no danger in the future could equal the danger that was past.

He thought:

"I know where I am!"

It had taken him years to discover where he was. Why should the discovery occur just then? He could only suppose that the cumulative battering of experience had at length knocked a hole through his thick head, and let saving wisdom in. The length of time necessary for the operation depended upon the thickness of the head. Some heads were impenetrable and their owners came necessarily to disaster. His head was probably of an average thickness.

When he got into Trafalgar Road, at the summit of Bleak-ridge, he hesitated to enter his own house, on account of the acute social difficulties that awaited him there, and passed it like a beggar who is afraid. One by one he went by all the new little streets of cottages with drawing-rooms—Millett Street, Wilcox Street, Paul Street, Oak Street, Hulton Street,—and the two old little streets, already partly changed—Manor Street and Higginbotham Street. Those mysterious

new-coming families from nowhere were driving him out—through the agency of his wife! The Orgreaves had gone, and been succeeded by excellent people with whom it was impossible to fraternize. There were rumours that in view of Tom Swetnam's imminent defection the Swetnam household might be broken up and the home abandoned. The Suttons, now that Beatrice Sutton had left the district, talked seriously of going. Only Dr. Stirling was left on that side of the road, and he stayed because he must. The once exclusive Terraces on the other side were losing their quality. Old Darius Clayhanger had risen out of the mass, but he was fiercely exceptional. Now the whole mass seemed to be rising under the action of some strange leaven, and those few who by intelligence, by manners, or by money counted themselves select were fleeing as from an inundation. Edwin had not meant to join in the exodus. But he, too, would join it. Destiny had seized him. Let him be as democratic in spirit as he would, his fate was to be cut off from the democracy, with which, for the rest, he had very little of speech or thought or emotion in common, but in which, from an implacable sense of justice, he was religiously and unchangeably determined to put his trust.

He braced himself, and, mounting the steps of the porch, felt in his pocket for his latchkey. It was not there. Hilda had taken it and not returned it. She never did return it when she borrowed it, and probably she never would. He had intended to slip quietly into the house, and prepare if possible an astute opening to minimize the difficulty of the sences which must inevitably occur. For his dignity would need some protection. In the matter of his dignity, he wished that he had not said quite so certainly to Ingpen: "I shan't take that house."

With every prim formality, Emmie answered his ring. She was wearing the mask and the black frock and the white apron and cap of her vocation. Not the slightest trace of the beatified woman in the flowered hat under the lamp at the gates of the churchyard! No sign of a heart or of passion or of ecstasy! Incredible creatures—they were all incredible!

He thought, nervous:

"I shall meet Hilda in half a second."



George ran into the hall, wearing his new green shade over his eyes.

"Here he is, mother!" cried George. "I say, nunks, Emmie brought up a parcel for you from Uncle Albert and Auntie Clara. Here it is. It wasn't addressed outside, so I opened it."

He indicated the hall-table, on which, in a bed of tissue-paper and brown paper, lay a dreadful flat inkstand of blue glass and bronze, with a card: "Best wishes to Edwin from Albert and Clara."

George and Edwin gazed at each other with understanding.

"Just my luck, isn't it, sonny?" said Edwin. "It's worse than last year's."

"You poor dear!" said Hilda, appearing, all smiles and caressing glances. She was in a pale grey dress. "Whatever shall you do with it? You know you'll have to put it on view when they come up. Emmie,"—to the maid vanishing into the kitchen—"we'll have supper now."

"Yes," said Edwin to himself, with light but sardonic tolerance. "Yes, my lady. You're all smiles because you're bent on getting Ladderedge Hall out of me. But you don't know what a near shave you've had of getting something else."

He was elated. The welcome of his familiar home was beautiful to him. And the incalculable woman with a single gesture had most unexpectedly annihilated the unpleasant past and its consequences. He could yield upon the grand contention how and when he chose. He had his acquiescence waiting like a delightful surprise for Hilda. As he looked at her lovingly, with all her crimes of injustice thick upon her, he clearly realized that he saw her as no other person saw her, and that because it was so she in her entirety was indispensable to him. And when he tried to argue impartially and aloofly with himself about rights and wrongs, asinine reason was swamped by an entirely irrational and wise joy in the simple fact of the criminal's existence.

## VI

In the early spring of 1897 there was an evening party at the Clayhangers'. But it was not called a party; it was

not even called a reception. The theory of the affair was that Hilda had "just asked a few people to come in, without any fuss." The inhabitants of the Five Towns had, and still have, an aversion for every sort of formal hospitality, or indeed for any hospitality other than the impulsive and the haphazard. One or two fathers with forceful daughters agitated by newly revealed appetites in themselves, might hire a board-school-room in January, and give a dance at which sharp exercise and hot drinks alone kept bodies warm in the icy atmosphere. Also musical and dramatic societies and games clubs would have annual conversaziones and dances, which however were enterprises of co-operation rather than of hospitality. Beyond these semi-public entertainments there was almost nothing, in the evening, save card-parties and the small regular reunions of old friends who had forgathered on a certain night of the week for whisky or tea and gossip ever since the beginning of time, and would continue to do so till some coffin or other was ordered. Every prearranged assemblage comprising more than two persons beyond the family was a 'function'—a term implying both contempt and respect for ceremonial; and no function could be allowed to occur without an excuse for it,—such as an anniversary. The notion of deliberately cultivating human intercourse for its own sake would have been regarded as an affectation approaching snobbishness. Hundreds of well-to-do and socially unimpeachable citizens never gave or received an invitation to a meal. The reason of all this was not meanness, for no community outside America has more generous instincts than the Five Towns; it was merely a primitive self-consciousness striving to conceal itself beneath breezy disdain for those more highly developed manners which it read about with industry and joy in the weekly papers, but which it lacked the courage to imitate.

The break-up of the Orgreave household had been a hard blow to the cult of hospitality in Bleakridge. Lane End House in the old days was a creative centre of hospitality; for the force of example, the desire to emulate, and the necessity of paying in kind for what one has permitted oneself to receive will make hosts of those who, by their own initiative, would never have sent out an invitation. When the Orgreaves

vanished, sundry persons in Bleakridge were discouraged,—and particularly Edwin and Hilda whose musical evenings had never recovered from the effect of the circumstances of the first one. They entertained only by fits and starts, when Hilda happened to remember that she held a high position in the suburb. Hilda was handicapped by the fact that she could not easily strike up friendships with other women. She had had one friend, and after Janet's departure she had fully confided in no woman. Moreover it was only at intervals that Hilda felt the need of companionship. Her present party was due chiefly to what Edwin in his more bitter moods would have called snobbishness,—to wit, partly a sudden resolve not to be outshone by the Swetnams, who in recent years, as the younger generation of the family grew up, had beyond doubt increased their ascendancy; and partly the desire to render memorable the last months of her residence in Bleakridge.

The list of Hilda's guests, and the names absent from it, gave an indication of the trend of social history. The Benbows were not asked; the relations of the two families remained as friendly as ever they were, but the real breach between them, caused by profound differences of taste and intelligence, was now complete. Maggie would have been asked, had she not refused in advance, from a motive of shyness. In all essential respects Maggie had been annexed by Clara and Albert. She had given up Auntie Hamps's house (of which the furniture had been either appropriated or sold) and gone to live with the Benbows as a working aunt,—this in spite of Albert's default in the matter of interest; she forwent her rights, slept in a small room with Amy, paid a share of the household expenses, and did the work of a nursemaid and servant combined—simply because she was Maggie. She might, had she chosen, have lived in magnificence with the Clayhangers, but she would not face the intellectual and social strain of doing so. Jim Orgreave was not invited; briefly he had become impossible, though he was still well-dressed. More strange—Tom Orgreave and his wife had only been invited after some discussion, and had declined! Tom was growing extraordinarily secretive, solitary, and mysterious. It was reported that Mrs. Tom had neither servant nor nurse-

maid, and that she dared not ask her husband for money to buy clothes. Yet Edwin and Tom when they met in the street always stopped for a talk, generally about books. Daisy Marrion, who said openly that Tom and Mrs. Tom were a huge disappointment to everybody, was invited and she accepted. Janet Orgreave had arrived in Bursley on a visit to the Clayhangers on the very day of the party. The Cheswardines were asked, mainly on account of Stephen, whose bluff, utterly unintellectual, profound good-nature, and whose adoration of his wife, were gradually endearing him to the perceptive. Mr. and Mrs. Fearn were requested to bring their daughter Annunciata, now almost marriageable, and also Mademoiselle Renée Souchon, the French governess, newly arrived in the district, of the Fearns' younger children. Folks hinted their astonishment that Alma Fearn should have been imprudent enough to put so exotic a woman under the same roof with her husband. Ingpen needed no invitation; nothing could occur at the Clayhangers' without him. Doctor Stirling was the other mature bachelor. Finally in the catalogue were four Swetnams, the vigorous and acute Sarah (who was a mere acquaintance), aged twenty-five, Tom Swetnam, and two younger brothers. Tom had to bring with him the prime excuse for the party,—namely, Miss Manna Höst of Copenhagen, to whom Hilda intended to show that the Swetnams were not the only people on earth. There were thus eight women, eight men (who had put on evening-dress out of respect for the foreigner), and George.

At eleven o'clock, when the musical part of the entertainment was over, Miss Höst had already fully secured for herself the position which later she was to hold as the wife of Tom Swetnam. Bleakridge had been asked to meet her and inspect her, and the opinion of Bleakridge was soon formed that Copenhagen must be a wondrous and a romantic place and that Tom Swetnam knew his way about. In the earliest years when the tourist agencies first discovered the advertising value of the phrase "Land of the Midnight Sun," Tom the adventurous had made the Scandinavian round trip, and each subsequent summer he had gone off again in the same direction. The serpents of the Hanbridge and the Bursley

Conservative clubs, and of the bar of the Five Towns Hotel, had wagered that there was a woman at the bottom of it. There was. He had met her at Marienlyst, the watering-place near Helsingör (called by the tourist agencies Elsinore). Manna Höst was twenty-three, tall and athletically slim, and more blonde than any girl ever before seen in the Five Towns. She had golden hair and she wore white. It was understood that she spoke Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian. She talked French with facility to Renée Souchon. And Tom said that her knowledge of German surpassed her knowledge of either French or English. She spoke English excellently, with a quaint, endearing accent, but with correctness. Sometimes she would use an idiom (picked up from the Swetnam boys), exquisitely unaware that it was not quite suited to the lips of a young woman in a strange drawing-room; her innocence, however, purified it.

She sang classical songs in German, with dramatic force, and she could play accompaniments. She was thoroughly familiar with all the music haltingly performed by Ingpen, Janet, Annunciata, and young George. Ingpen was very seriously interested in her views thereon. She knew about the French authors from whose works Renée Souchon chose her recitations. And standing up at the buffet-table in the dining-room, she had fabricated astounding sandwiches in the Danish style. She stated that Danish cooks reckoned ninety-three sorts of sandwiches. She said in her light, eager voice, apropos of cooking: "There is one thing I cannot understand. I cannot understand why you English throw your potatoes to melt in cold water for an hour before you boil them." "Nor I!" interjected Renée Souchon. No other woman standing round the table had ever conceived the propriety of boiling potatoes without first soaking them in cold water, and Manna was requested to explain. "Because," she said, "it—it lets go the salts of potassium which are so necessary for the pheelsical development of the body." Whereupon Tertius Ingpen had been taken by one of his long *crescendo* laughs, a laugh that ended by his being bent nearly double below the level of the table. Everybody was much impressed, and Ingpen himself not the least. Ingpen wondered what a girl so complex could see in a man like Tom Swetnam,



who, although he could talk freely about the arts, had no real feeling for any of them.

But what impressed the company even more than Miss Höst's accomplishments was the candid fervour of her comprehensive interest in life, which was absolutely without self-consciousness or fear. She talked with the same disarming ingenuous eager directness to hard-faced Charles Fearn, the secret rake ; to his wife, the ageing and sweetly-sad mother of a family ; to Renée Souchon, who despite her plainness and her rumoured bigotry seemed to attract all the men in the room by something provocative in her eye and the carriage of her hips ; to the simple and powerful Stephen Cheswardine ; to Vera, the delicious and elegant cat ; to Doctor Stirling with his Scotch mysticism ; and to Tertius Ingpen the connoisseur and avowed bachelor. She spoke to Hilda, Janet and Daisy Marrion as one member of a secret sisterhood to other members, to Annunciata as a young girl, and to George as an initiated sister. She left them to turn to Edwin with a trustful glance as to one whose special reliability she had divined from the first. "Have a liqueur, Miss Höst," Edwin enjoined her. In a moment she was sipping Chartreuse. "I love it !" she murmured.

But somehow beneath all such freedoms and frankness she did not cease to be a maiden with reserves of mystery. Her assumption that nobody could misinterpret her demeanour was remarkable to the English observers, and far more so to Renée Souchon. All gazed at her piquant blonde face, scarcely pretty, with its ardent restless eyes, and felt the startling compliment of her quick, searching sympathy. And she, tinglingly aware of her success, proved easily equal to the ordeal of it. Only at rare intervals did she give a look at the betrothed, as if for confirmation of her security. As for Tom, he was positively somewhat unnerved by the brilliance of the performance. He left her alone, without guidance, as a ring-master who should stand aside during a turn and say : "See this marvel ! I am no longer necessary." When people glanced at him after one of her effects, he would glance modestly away, striving to hide from them his illusion that he himself had created the bewitching girl. At half-past eleven, when the entire assemblage passed into the

drawing-room, she dropped on to the piano-stool and began a Waldteufel waltz with irresistible seductiveness. Hilda's heart leaped. In a minute the carpet was up, and the night, which all had supposed to be at an end, began.

At nearly one o'clock in the morning the party was moving strongly by its own acquired momentum and needed neither the invigoration nor the guidance which hosts often are compelled to give. Hilda, having finished a schottische with Doctor Stirling, missed Janet from the drawing-room. Leaving the room in search of her, she saw Edwin with Tom Swetnam and the glowing Manna at the top of the stairs.

"Hello!" she called out. "What are you folks doing?"

Manna's light laugh descended like a shower of crystals.

"Just taking a constitutional," Edwin answered.

Hilda waved to them in passing. She was extremely elated. Among other agreeable incidents was the success of her new black lace frock. Edwin's voice pleased her,—it was so calm, wise, and kind, and at the same time mysteriously ironical. She occasionally admitted, at the sound of that voice when Edwin was in high spirits, that she had never been able to explore completely the more withdrawn arcana of his nature. He had behaved with perfection that evening. She admitted that he was the basis of the evening, that without him she could never have such triumphs. It was strange that a man by spending so many hours per day at a works could create the complicated ease and luxury of a home. She perceived how steadily and surely he had progressed since their marriage, and how his cautiousness always justified itself, and how he had done all that he had said he would do. And she had a vision of that same miraculous creative force of his at work, by her volition, in the near future upon Ladderedge Hall. Her mood became a strange compound of humility before him and of self-confident pride in her own power to influence him.

In the boudoir Janet was reclining in the sole easy chair. Dressed in grey (she had abandoned white), she was as slim as ever, and did not look her age. With face flushed, eyes glinting under drooping lids, and bosom heaving rather quickly, she might have passed in the half-light for a young

married woman still under the excitement of matrimony, instead of a virgin of forty.

"I was so done up I had to come and hide myself!" she murmured in a dreamy tone.

"Well, of course you've had the journey to-day and everything. . . ."

"I never did come across such a dancer as Charles Fearn!" Janet went on.

"Yes," said Hilda, standing with her back to the fire, with one hand on the mantelpiece. "He's a great dancer—or at least he makes you think so. But I'm sure he's a bad man."

"Yes, I suppose he is!" Janet agreed with a sigh.

Neither of the women spoke for a moment, and each looked away.

Through the closed door came the muffled sound of the piano, played by Annunciata. No melody was distinguishable,—only the percussion of the bass chords beating out the time of a new mazurka. It was as if the whole house faintly but passionately pulsed in the fever of the dance.

"I see you've got a Rossetti," said Janet at last, fingering a blue volume that lay on the desk.

"Edwin gave it me," Hilda replied. "He's gradually giving me all my private poets. But somehow I haven't been able to read much lately. I expect it's the idea of moving into the country that makes me restless."

"But is it settled, all that?"

"Of course it's settled, my dear. I'm determined to take him away"—Hilda spoke of her husband as of a parcel or an intelligent bear on a chain, as loving wives may—"right out of all this. I'm sure it will be a good thing for him. He doesn't mind, really. He's promised me. Only he wants to make sure of either selling or letting this house first. He's always very cautious, Edwin is. He simply hates doing a thing straight off."

"Yes, he is rather that way inclined," said Janet.

"I wanted him to take Ladderedge at once, even if we didn't move into it. Anyhow we couldn't move into it immediately because of the repairs and things. They'll take a fine time, I know. We can get it for sixty pounds a year. And what's

sixty pounds more or less to Edwin? It's no more than what the rent of this house would be. But no, he wouldn't! He must see where he stands with this house before he does anything else! You can't alter him, you know!"

The door was cautiously pushed, and Ingpen entered.

"So you're discussing her!" he said, low, with a satiric grin.

"Discussing who?" Hilda sharply demanded.

"You know."

"Tertius," said Hilda. "You're worse than a woman."

He giggled with delight.

"I suppose you mean that to be very severe."

"If you want to know, we were talking about Ladderedge."

"So apologize!" said Janet, sitting up.

Ingpen's face straightened, and he began to tap his teeth with his thumb.

"Curious! That's just what I came in about. I've been trying to get a chance to tell you all the evening. There's somebody else after Ladderedge, a man from Axe. He's been to look over it twice this week. I thought I'd tip you the wink."

Hilda stood erect, putting her shoulders back.

"Have you told Edwin?" she asked very curtly.

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He said it was only a dodge of the house-agent's to quicken things up."

"And do you think it is?"

"Well, I doubt it," Ingpen answered apprehensively. "That's why I wanted to warn you—his lordship being what he is."

Voices, including Edwin's, could be heard in the hall.

"Here, I'm not going to be caught conspiring with you!" Ingpen whispered. "It's more than my place is worth." And he departed.

The voices receded, and Hilda noiselessly shut the door. Everything was now changed for her by a tremendous revulsion. The beating of the measure of the mazurka seemed horrible and maddening. Her thought was directed upon Edwin with the cold fury of which only love is capable. It

was not his fault that some rival was nibbling at Ladderedge, but it was his fault that Ladderedge should still be in peril. She saw all her grandiose plan ruined. She felt sure that the rival was powerful and determined, and that Edwin would let him win, either by failing to bid against him, or by mere shilly-shallying. Ladderedge was not the only suitable country residence in the county ; there were doubtless many others ; but Ladderedge was just what she wanted, and—more important with her—it had become a symbol. She had a misgiving that if they did not get Ladderedge they would remain in Trafalgar Road, Bursley, for ever and ever. Yet, angry and desperate though she was, she somehow did not accuse and arraign Edwin—any more than she would have accused and arraigned a climate. He was in fact the climate in which she lived. A moment ago she had said : “ You can’t alter him ! ” But now all the energy of her volition cried out that he must be altered.

“ My girl,” she said, turning to Janet. “ Do you think you can stand a scene to-morrow ? ”

“ A scene ? ” Janet repeated the words guardedly. The look on Hilda’s face somewhat alarmed her.

“ Between Edwin and me. I’m absolutely determined that we shall take Ladderedge, and I don’t care how much of a row we have over it.”

“ It isn’t as bad as all that ? ” Janet softly murmured, with her skill to soothe.

“ Yes, it is ! ” said Hilda violently.

“ I was wondering the other day, after one of your letters,” Janet proceeded gently, “ why after all you were so anxious to go into the country. I thought you wanted Edwin to be on the Town Council or something of that kind. How can he do that if you’re right away at a place like Stockbrook ? ”

“ So I should like him to be on the Town Council ! But all I really want is to get him away from his business. You don’t know, Janet ! ” she spoke bitterly, and with emotion. “ Nobody knows except me. He’ll soon be the slave of his business if he keeps on. Oh, I don’t mean he stays at nights at it. He scarcely ever does. But he’s always thinking about it. He simply can’t bear being a minute late for it,



everything must give way to it,—he takes that as a matter of course, and that's what annoys me, especially as there's no reason for it, seeing how much he trusts Big James and Simpson. I believe he'd do anything for Big James. He'd listen to Big James far sooner than he'd listen to me. . . . Disagreeable fawning old man, and quite stupid! Simpson isn't so bad. I tell you Edwin only looks on his home as a nice place to be quiet in when he isn't at the works. I've never told him so, and I don't think he suspects it, but I will tell him one of these days. He's very good, Edwin is, in all the little things. He always tries to be just. But he isn't just, in the big thing. He's most frightfully unjust. I sometimes wonder where he imagines I come in. Of course he'd do any mortal thing for me—except spare half a minute from the works. . . . What do I care about money? I don't care *that* much about money. When there's money I can spend it, that's all. But I'd prefer to be poor, and him to be rude and cross and impatient—which he scarcely ever is—than have this feeling all the time that it's the works first, and everything else second. I don't mind for myself—no, really I don't, at least very little! But I do mind for him. I call it humiliating for a man to get like that. It puts everything upside down. Look at Stephen Cheswardine, for instance. There's a pretty specimen! And Edwin'll be as bad as him soon."

"But every one says how fond Stephen is of his wife!"

"And isn't Edwin fond of me? Stephen Cheswardine despises his wife—only he can't do without her. That's all. And he treats her accordingly. And I shall be the same."

"Oh! Hilda!"

"Yes, I shall. Yes, I shall. But I won't have it. I'd as lief be married to a man like Charles Fearn. He isn't a slave to his business anyhow. I shall get Edwin farther away. And when I've got him away I shall see he doesn't go to the works on Saturdays, too. I've quite made up my mind about that. And if he isn't on the Town Council he can be on the County Council—that's quite as good, I hope!"

Never before had Hilda spoken so freely to anyone, not even to Janet. Fierce pride had always kept her self-con-

tained. But now she had no feeling of shame at her outburst. Tears stood in her eyes—and yet she faced Janet, making no effort to hide them.

“My dear!” breathed the deprecating Janet, shocked out of her tepid virginal calm by a revelation of conjugal misery such as had never been vouchsafed to her. She was thinking: “How can the poor thing face her guests after this? Everybody will see that something’s happened—it will be awful! She really ought to think of her position.”

There was a silence.

The door opened with a sharp sound, and Hilda turned away her head as from the suddenly visible mouth of a cannon. The music could be heard plainly, and beneath it the dull shuffling of feet on the bare boards of the drawing-room. Manna Höst came in radiant, followed by Edwin and Tom Swetnam.

“Well, Hilda,” said Edwin, with a slight timid constraint. “I’ve got rid of your house for you. Here are the deluded victims.”

“We have seen every corner of it, Mrs. Clayhanger,” said Manna Höst enthusiastically. “It is lovely. But how can you wish to leave it? It is so practical!”

Perceiving the agitation of Hilda’s face, Edwin added in a lower voice to his wife:

“I thought I wouldn’t say anything until it was settled, for fear you might be let in for a disappointment. He’ll buy it if I leave fifteen hundred on mortgage. So I shall. But of course he wanted her to have a good look at it first.”

“How unfair I am!” thought Hilda, as she made some banal remark to Miss Höst. “Don’t I know I can always rely on him?”

“Mr. Clayhanger made us promise not to——” Miss Höst began to explain.

“It was just like him!” Hilda interrupted, smiling.

She had a strong desire to jump at Edwin and kiss him. She was saved. Her grandiose plan would proceed. The house sold, Edwin was bound to secure Ladderedge Hall against no matter what rival; and he would do it. But it was the realization of her power over her husband that gave her the profoundest joy.

About an hour later, when every one felt that the party was over, the guests, reluctant to leave, and excited afresh by the news that the house had changed hands during the revel, were all assembled in the drawing-room. A few were seated on the chairs which, with the tables, had been pushed against the walls. George had squatted on the carpet rolled up into the hearth, where the fire was extinct ; he was not wearing his green shade. The rest were grouped around Manna Höst in the middle of the room.

Miss Höst, the future mistress of the abode, was now more than ever the centre of regard. Apparently as fresh as at the start, and picking delicately at a sweet biscuit, the flushed blonde stood answering questions about her views on England and especially on the Five Towns. She was quite sure of herself, and utterly charming in her confidence. Annunciata Fearn's envied her acutely. The other women were a little saddened by the thought of all the disillusiones that inevitably lay before her. It was touching to see her glance at Tom Swetnam, convinced that she understood him to the core, and in him all the psychology of his sex.

"Everybody knows," she was saying, "that the English are the finest nation, and I think the Five Towns are much more English than London. That's why I adore the Five Towns. You do not know how English you are here. It makes me laugh because you are so English, and you do not know it. I love you."

"You're flattering us," said Stephen Cheswardine, enchanted with the girl.

Everybody waited in eager delight for her next words. Such tit-bits of attention and laudation did not often fall to the district. It occurred to people that after all the local self-conceit might not be entirely unjustified.

"Ah !" Manna pouted. "But you have spots !"

"Spots !" repeated young Paul Swetnam, amid a general laugh.

She turned to him : "You said there were no spots on Knype Football Club, did you not ? Well, there is a spot on you English. You are dreadfully exasperating to us Danes. Oh, I mean it ! You are exasperating because you will not show your feelings !"

"Tom, that must be one for you," said Charlie Fearn.

"We're too proud," said Doctor Stirling.

"No," replied Manna maliciously. "It is not pride. You are afraid to show your feelings. It is because you are cowards—in that!"

"We aren't!" cried Hilda inspired. And yielding to the temptation which had troubled her incessantly ever since she left the boudoir, she put her arms round Edwin and kissed him. "So there!"

"Loud applause!" said young George on the roll of carpet. He said it kindly but with a certain superiority, perhaps due to the facts that he was wearing a man's 'long trousers' for the first time that night, and that he regarded himself as already almost a Londoner. There was some hand-clapping.

Edwin's eyes had seduced Hilda. Looking at them surreptitiously, she had suddenly recalled another of his tricks,—tricks of goodness. When she had told him one evening that Minnie was prematurely the mother of a girl, he had said: "Well, we'll put £130 in the savings bank for the kid." "£130? Whatever are you talking about?" "£130. I received it from America this very morning as ever is." And he showed her a draft on Brown, Shipley & Co. He said 'from America.' He was too delicate to say 'from George Cannon.' It had been a triumphant moment for him. And now, as before them all Hilda held him to her, the delicious thought that she had power over him, that she was shaping the large contours of his existence, made her feel solemn in her bliss. And yet simultaneously she was reflecting with a scarcely perceptible hardness: "It's each for himself in marriage after all, and I've got my own way." And then she noticed the whiteness of his shirt-front under her chin, and that reminded her of his mania for arranging his linen according to his own ideas, in his own drawer, and the absurd tidiness of his linen; and she wanted to laugh.

"What a romance she has made of my life!" thought Edwin, confused and blushing, as she loosed him. And though he looked round with affection at the walls which would soon no longer be his, the greatness of the adventure of existence with this creature, to him unique, and the eternal

expectation of some new ecstasy, left no room in his heart for a regret.

He caught sight of Ingpen alone in a corner by the piano, nervously stroking his silky beard. The memory of the secret woman in Ingpen's room came back to him. Without any process of reasoning, he felt very sorry for both of them, and he was aware of a certain condescension in himself towards Ingpen.

22/8/32.



